

Hitler's Happy People:  
*Kraft durch Freude's* Everyday Production of Joy in the Third Reich

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The dissertation by Julia Timpe is accepted in its present form  
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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Julia Timpe was born on November 21, 1980 in Wolfenbüttel, Germany and came to Brown University, Providence, RI in 2004 as an exchange student from Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany, where she was enrolled in a *Magister Artium* program in the fields of Modern and Contemporary History (major,) Modern German Literature and European Ethnology (minors.) At Brown, she first worked as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of German Studies, before entering the Ph.D. program of Brown's History Department in 2006. She received an A.M. in History from Brown in 2007 and passed her preliminary examinations with distinction in 2008 in her major field Modern German History (with Omer Bartov) and her minor fields Modern European History (with Deborah Cohen) and Modern Russian History (with Ethan Pollock.)

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## INTRODUCTION

The Third Reich was a happy place, filled with joyful activities, organized by the Nazi regime. This is the thesis of this dissertation, put at its most provocative. In “Hitler’s Happy People,” I uncover an unexpectedly light, cheerful side of everyday life during the Third Reich – we will encounter “happy gymnastics,” cheerful (and boozy) social evenings, the “best German vaudeville” and a concern to “beautify” living environments and workspaces. This rather counterintuitive image of Nazi Germany will emerge from my analysis of the Nazi leisure organization “*Kraft durch Freude*” [“Strength through Joy,” KdF in short.] KdF was a promoter of a great variety of “cheerful” activities, in the fields of culture, sports, education and travel. Officially a “National Socialist Association” [“*Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft*,”] KdF was an integral part of the Nazi state. However, it mostly eschewed efforts towards political indoctrination at its events. KdF managed through this “politically-alooof” attitude, and especially through its focus on the “production of everyday joy,” to contribute significantly to Nazi Germany’s stability and longevity.<sup>1</sup>

KdF’s arsenal of leisure activities was manifold. The organization offered sports classes of all kinds, made available subsidized tickets for cultural events, and arranged theater and opera performances, concerts, and vaudeville shows. KdF also promoted

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<sup>1</sup> My work is thus part of a newer strand of research that examines the Third Reich under the premise that “[f]or the Nazis, the regime and the society it sought to construct were to become the source of happiness.”(Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d’ Almeida, “Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany: An Introduction,” in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela E. Swett, Ross, Corey, and Fabrice d’ d’ Almeida (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.)

amateur art and had a branch concerned with adult education. An additional department was concerned with the improvement and beautification of life and conditions in the industrial sphere.

KdF was founded a few months after the Nazis' rise to power in November 1933,<sup>2</sup> and continued its work almost until the end of WWII. During the war, it was also in charge of entertaining German soldiers and of activities for "Ethnic Germans" living in German-occupied areas. KdF attempted to invade private and public spaces and sought to "civilize" segments of German populations – by using ("high brow" German) culture and leisure – from the pre-war years to the period of WW II.

What, exactly, were KdF's goals, practices and reception? Wherever possible my analysis will pursue three stages of inquiry: what did KdF want to do (and why), what did it do (and why) and how was this received?<sup>3</sup> This structure brings out several, interrelated, general themes in my dissertation. All of them can be characterized as containing or being situated within a certain tension. First, KdF engaged diverging concepts of "culture." Second, KdF's work existed along an axis between the conflicting demands of dissemination of politics and ideology on the one hand and that of joy

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<sup>2</sup> As I will also describe in chapter one, the Nazi leisure organization's foundation had been inspired by the leisure organization of Fascist Italy, *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*. For a comparative study about social and leisure politics in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, see Daniela Liebscher, "Faschismus als Modell: Die faschistische Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro und die NS-Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude' in der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, ed. Sven Reichardt and Armin Nolzen (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 94-118. A more detailed and broader analysis is provided in her 2009 monograph: Daniela Liebscher, *Freude und Arbeit: Zur internationalen Freizeit- und Sozialpolitik des faschistischen Italien und des NS-Regimes*, 16 (Cologne: SH-Verl., 2009).

<sup>3</sup> This examination of people's reception is, of course, different from determining definitely the effects of KdF's work in terms of "winning over Germans" to believe in the Nazi state; in this regard, this study can only be speculative. For a meditation on the challenges and problems regarding "identifying, gauging or measuring of belief," see Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 69 and 100-105.

production on the other. Third, and very closely related to both these themes, KdF worked with several diverse conceptions of joy that constantly stood in tension and sometimes were at odds with each other.

One of KdF's main goals was to "bring culture" to Germans, especially German workers. KdF's cultural work in this realm was characterized by a tension between "high brow" culture and "low brow" entertainment.<sup>4</sup> KdF's cultural activities confirm the ideas of scholars such as Jost Hermand, who has argued that it would "be hardly possible to speak about an integrated or even ideologically coherent Nazi cultural politics. High brow [culture] stood next to low brow [culture], archaic next to technological, demanding next to trivial-entertaining" arts and culture."<sup>5</sup> Despite recurrent official propagandistic statements from KdF, its 'joy production' led to an abandonment of all practices involved in providing either "high" or specifically "German" art.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On the concepts of "high" and "low" culture for the German context, see Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, eds., *High and Low Cultures: German Attempts at Mediation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Jost Hermand, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Primus, 2006), 135. The tension in the arena of cultural politics also had to do with institutional conflicts and turf wars within the regime, for example between Robert Ley, the head of KdF and DAF, and Alfred Rosenberg, Commissar for Supervision of Intellectual and Ideological Education of the Nazi party, and their respective organizations; briefly put, Ley wanted a new "workers culture," while Rosenberg promoted a "folk community culture." (Jost Hermand, *Stile, Ismen, Etiketten : zur Periodisierung der modernen Kunst* (Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1978), 110. On Rosenberg, his office, and the Third Reich's polycratic turf wars around it, cf. Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verl. Anst., 1970). A third "competitor" in the arena of Nazi cultural politics was the *Reich* Culture Chamber under Joseph Goebbels; on this, cf. Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, & Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> KdF could thus be considered an extreme case of a symptom which Georg Bollenbeck identified in Nazi German culture: "National Socialism always invoked the highest values of German "culture" and broke with them". (Georg Bollenbeck, *Bildung und Kultur: Glanz und Elend eines Deutschen Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1994), 294.)

In addition, when it comes to KdF audiences, we will see in this dissertation how KdF extended some of its leisure activities to some foreign workers. This was based on the supposition that joy at work would enhance performance – something that was wanted from these workers. But of course, beliefs of

KdF's "cultural" events and performances were also mostly devoid of political or Nazi content.<sup>7</sup> KdF's leaders consciously chose to abstain from direct political indoctrination. This meant that its activities led to the organization's overall popularity and "success." There was a tension between the dissemination of politics and ideology on the one hand and that of "non-political" joy production on the other. KdF events focused on entertainment and seldom or never took on the function of disseminating political-ideological content. The leisure organization was, of course, embedded in Nazi ideology. In fact, KdF was shaped deeply by Nazi thought. More general "Nazi values," however, were more important than specific Nazi policies. For KdF, the "positive," productive, and integrative ideas of National Socialism took center stage, especially the concept of a harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>8</sup> At the core of KdF's work was building the Nazi "national" or "racial community" – that is, to unite all "Aryan" Germans beyond any class boundaries and social differences.

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German racial superiority were at odds with this.

<sup>7</sup> This is in line with diagnoses that the majority of artworks produced in the Third Reich can be called "non-fascist." According to Jost Hermand, only "five to ten percent [of all artworks] at most had such blatant [Nazi] tendencies; Hermand, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 132.

<sup>8</sup> *Volksgemeinschaft* has been translated as "ethnic community," "folk community," "national community" or "racial community." In this study, when not using the German term, I will use "racial community" to emphasize that this concept was deeply embedded in Nazi racial thinking; as Kurt Bauer summarized: "The National Socialists aspired a racial social utopia of a racially pure, Aryan-German *Volksgemeinschaft* in a Eurasian space dominated by Germany;" Kurt Bauer, *Nationalsozialismus : Ursprünge, Anfänge, Aufstieg Und Fall* (Wien: Böhlau, 2008), 109.

Of course, the term *Volksgemeinschaft* was by no means a "Nazi-term;" it had been part of the German (political) discourse since the 19th century, and became very virulent during WWI. (See Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, "Einleitung," in *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), 10; Michael Wildt, "Die Ungleichheit des Volkes: 'Volksgemeinschaft' in der politischen Kommunikation der Weimarer Republik," in *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), 40.) On the usage of the term in the Weimar Republic, cf. Wildt, "Die Ungleichheit des Volkes."

What did “joy” mean to the KdF? KdF focused on joy above all things, but this “joy” was an unstable and polysemic notion. To understand KdF’s activities and reception is to see how the concept of ‘joy’ structures a complex story, while simultaneously seeing how the concept of joy itself is complex, multifarious, and even contradictory.

The notion of joy came from the organization itself. Its chosen name “*Kraft durch Freude*” [“Strength through Joy”] declaims a concern for joy. Etymologically, the German word “*Freude*” is related to the German word “*froh*” [cheerful, blithe, glad.] Even though there are no indications that KdF founders or functionaries knew about this, it is important to note that “*froh*” stems from the Norse word “*frár*,” meaning “fast” or “rapid.” Most likely, it is also related to the Sanskrit word *pravát*, which means in modern German “*Vorwärtsdrang, schneller Fortgang*,” [“forward thrust, fast progress.”]<sup>9</sup> Embedded in the organization’s title was a connection to both activity and productivity – two aspects that incidentally also play a role in the kind of “joy” KdF was after.<sup>10,11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See “froh,” *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2002); “Freude,” *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (Berlin ; New York: De Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Additionally, we need to recall that the German term could also be translated by “happiness.” But clearly this term is equally broad and in need of conceptualization; for a philosophical history of the concept of happiness, see Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness : A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005). Overall, this translational flexibility is a reflection of the fact that in both German and English, concepts such as joy and joyfulness, happiness, cheerfulness, contentment, well-being, amusement, merriment and enjoyment, even bliss and ecstasy, are all closely related, but also pick up on various subtle differences in sense and connotation. (It seems to me that “joy” is the more common translation – prominently, we can also find in the title of Schiller’s “*Ode an die Freude*”/“Ode to Joy,” famously incorporated in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 (and later the anthem of the European Union). KdF itself translated the “*Freude*” in its name with “joy” in its English publications, and so did the contemporary press and, subsequently, the English-speaking historiographical scholarship.)

<sup>11</sup> Alongside ‘joy,’ the word ‘fun’ is another term I will use in this dissertation. I use this in ways closely related to the way I will use ‘joy,’ and as such it inherits the ambiguities and tensions of ‘joy’. Additionally, ‘fun’ is not a term KdF itself often employs – it hardly ever uses the nearest German equivalent (*Spaß*), never claiming that its activities *macht Spaß*, for example. However, I have chosen to use the word ‘fun’ because this sometimes seems to be the actual emphasis of many KdF activities. Roughly, I use ‘fun’ when an activity or event is amusing, cheerful or uplifting, and particularly if it involves active participation. The

But what *exactly* did KdF mean by “joy”? As was so often the case in Nazi thought, there is neither a fully-developed nor a coherent theory behind the concept. KdF wanted to produce “joy” based on voluntary participation, a “joy” that had an active component and was experienced collectively. This latter aspect of collective experience related to KdF’s goal of fostering the bonding of a German racial community.

We might imagine that in Nazi ideology, ‘joy’ would be defined as the whole-hearted participation in the Nazi regime and embracing its ideals and that conversely, anyone who was committed to Germany and Nazism must also be joyful. Something like this *was* encoded in KdF’s program. However, it would be wrong to think that such embracing of Nazism was considered a prerequisite for joy – rather, it was conceptualized as the final consequence of KdF’s joy, but nothing that necessarily had to be part of experiencing its (practices of) joy.

Most crucially, “joy” in KdF’s conception was a creative force; it would lead to more strength for each German and, in turn, for Germany overall. KdF was not merely the organization of ‘joy,’ but the organization that sought ‘strength through joy’. If the strength was the strength of an aggressive “Aryan” race, then KdF created joy in Germans to make them strong. That is, joy was a precondition for strength – perhaps a cause of strength. This argument was certainly maintained by KdF, along with the symmetrical claim that a successful Germany – a victorious Reich giving full expression to German territorial and cultural needs – would make its citizens joyful. There was a

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relation to joy would then be that a life that involves fun comes to be joyful overall – or, because of the ambiguities in the notion of joy, ‘fun’ is yet another loosely defined aspect of joy. (On the possible conceptual categorizations of “fun” – or the impossibility thereof, see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1949), 3.)

deeply circular relationship between “strength” and “joy.”<sup>12</sup>

It would be overly simplistic to claim that KdF “produced joy” without disseminating Nazi ideology. KdF’s work – and its joy production – was of course connected to Nazi ideology. I have already pointed out KdF’s concern for Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, theorized as a joyful collectivity. Further, KdF, as a sub-group of the ostentatiously pro-worker “German Labor Front” was also involved in the more ‘socialist’ concerns of National socialist ideology.<sup>13</sup> That is, KdF was interested in improving the lives of its audiences, typically the working and rural classes whose alleged lack of joy could be remedied according to socialist precepts, such as educating them, improving their working conditions, and giving them access to cultural and sporting activities the ‘bourgeoisie’ had formerly preserved to themselves.<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, KdF’s “joy production” referred to improving workers’ lives. While KdF was involved in practical changes to peoples’ living and working spaces, the focus of its endeavors was not primarily on these material issues. Instead, KdF hoped to dissolve any material demands by focusing on providing spiritually for the Germans.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Apparently also implied here is the supposition that only Aryan Germans could be joyful. That is, this superior form of joy was something only Germans could enjoy, and which only Germans could work to achieve. A great deal of normativity is built into this type of conception. Only real Germans can really enjoy joy. Only real Germans can be made strong through joy. Strength only brings joy to Germans. Apparent joy and merriment is not real if it is not reflective of German cultural values. Only properly Germanic art is joyful. And so on. But not always so much, I will argue, in KdF’s actual practice.

<sup>13</sup> Crucially for my thesis, trying *not* to read too much instrumental or ideological freight into the meaning of KdF activities better explains how those activities actually proceeded.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, none of this was properly theorized. For example, the Nazis accused the bourgeoisie and Marxists at the same time of being responsible for the inadequate living situations, both physically and mentally, of the German working class; meanwhile, ‘bourgeois’ (guilty of wealth or perhaps political liberalism) could often simply be translated as ‘Jewish’ (and, of course, Marxism was also ‘Jewish’ philosophy.)

<sup>15</sup> KdF’s leader Robert Ley conceded quite openly to how the organization and its “joy production” was to become an alternative to making any real material improvements: “Previous rulers believe that the people

KdF preferred ideal rather than material values, “happiness” instead of more money. Of course, this attitude also had a pragmatic background: the regime simply did not want to spend more on workers’ benefits; consequently, KdF also lacked the means to make great material changes. It seems however, that KdF did not react defensively to this deficit, but rather made it a virtue: Many of KdF’s ‘joy production’ practices were to be based on what could be called a “Do-it-Yourself” attitude (especially when it came to KdF’s labor [and cost] intensive beautification campaigns in factories and villages), and this meant cheap, but also active participation, just as KdF characterized joy.

There often was a normative element to joy – something that could clearly be seen in the beautification campaigns, for instance. Part of the effect of using the term ‘joy’ or ‘joyful’ rather than ‘happy’ or even merely ‘amused’ was that it seemed to connote a somewhat higher form of happiness. That is, someone who was joyful was more edified than someone who is merely amused. When the joy in question is cultural, it is often supposed that there is a distinction between ‘high-brow’ and ‘low-brow’ culture such that the latter may amuse and divert, but the only the former could produce joy.<sup>16</sup>

KdF operated with both a normative “high-brow,” or more German, joy and with activities whose ‘joys’ were more direct or simple. When KdF turned to these ‘lower quality’ activities, the concept of joy’s ambiguity became apparent. KdF, as an institution

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could only be made happy by providing for the full stomachs. Material demands, material desires was the sole content of their statesmanship. Yes, I dare to claim that even if they had succeeded, our people would not have been any more happy, but rather more unhappy than ever. We National Socialists know that we cannot remedy material destitution overnight. [...] But we know that we can have all Germans partake in the rich and high culture of German arts, music, theater and film, briefly put, in the joy and beauty of life in our people.” (BArch R 43 II/557, pag. 5.; “Kraft durch Freude. Kundgebung der Deutschen Arbeitsfront. Dr. Ley über die Feierabend- [sic] ‘Nach der Arbeit.’”)

<sup>16</sup> I have already touched on KdF’s complicated relationship to the dichotomy of ‘low brow’ versus ‘high brow’ culture previously in this introduction; as stated then, this tension is very much an ongoing theme running through this dissertation.



involved in turf wars with other organs of the Nazi state used joy to preserve and broaden its authority and bailiwick. In this regard, KdF justified its continuing institutional importance to critics within the regime using its theoretical commitment to strength through joy (for Germans). In addition, it justified itself through high attendance numbers of its events. This, however, means that there is a sort of contradiction: strength might be achieved through some sort of normative joy (according to the Nazi theory), but large audience numbers might be more easily obtained through less ‘proper’ amusements. KdF often opted to please its audience even if its amusements were not entirely ‘proper’ (and this even when sometimes criticized by the audience itself). But KdF did not simply seek to distract audiences. As an institution, KdF was interested in actually producing joy, even when not always sure what this meant. KdF did not really know what joy was, and as a result did not always try to meet its own demands for joy in any coherent manner.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, one could argue that to pursue joy, KdF would have needed to have some idea of what joy was. In fact, this is not true – mirages and rainbows’ ends can provoke energetic journeys without existing. The phrase to ‘pursue joy,’ however, deliberately echoes America’s famous ‘pursuit of happiness’. There has been a recent upsurge in sociological, psychological and neuroscientific research into ‘happiness’ which tends to critique the ideas that happiness is something that can be pursued. Rather, happiness is achieved not as a goal in itself but as a byproduct of pursuing and perhaps achieving other goals. See, for example, Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* (Vintage, 2007); or Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (Penguin (Non-Classics), 2006).

This conclusion is not entirely surprising and, in fact, dovetails with a powerful and very longstanding philosophical tradition. Aristotle (for example, in the *Nichomachean Ethics*; Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics: Translation with Commentaries and Glossary* (Grinnell, Iowa: Peripatetic Press, 1984).) stressed that humans ‘flourish’ or achieve *eudaimonia* – which might well be translated ‘joy’ – when actively pursuing ‘virtuous’ activities. A virtuous activity is any worthwhile human occupation: Aristotle would probably have agreed with KdF’s interest in sports, for example, and engagement with the social community is one of his key virtues.

KdF’s stress on engaged and collective activities need not, then, be far off the mark of joy, so long as these activities have some basic human appeal. This does not answer the question of which pursuits are more likely to produce joy. For Aristotle, the highest human virtues were intellection and ethical action but he cannot really say why, – at least, as J.L. Mackie puts it, his account is “too circular to be helpful [and an] air of indeterminacy persists;” J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth; New York: Penguin, 1977), 186. How much the worse for the KdF concept of joy, which had to fit into a background worldview as internally inconsistent as Nazism.

Though KdF was not clear or consistent about its concept of joy, it did produce some or at least some people claimed to get “joy” out of KdF activities.<sup>18</sup> KdF’s aims varied, but “joy” does unify them in a way that helps explain KdF. The organization itself, its organizers, its audiences, and its critics within the Nazi regime argued over KdF “joy.” To them, “joy” was a real concept and goal. KdF’s success in producing “joy” did affect the lives of Germans in the Nazi regime, and their acceptance of it, an effect visibly distinct from the results a cynical production of joy for instrumental effects such as indoctrination or distraction would have produced; ultimately, in fact, Germans’ acceptance of ‘non-ideological joy’ actually furthered the Nazi project.

Inspired by work done in the field of *Alltagsgeschichte*,<sup>19</sup> my dissertation explores

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(It is worth noting that KdF’s tendency not to define joy in material terms may amount to rejecting the commodification of joy. Part of the argument of researchers such as Gilbert and Layard is that the commodification of joy does not serve the pursuit of joy. I do not wish to argue for any great insight on KdF’s part here, but my dissertation will show that its concept of joy, based in active, voluntary participation is not simply a commodification of happiness – as Shelley Baranowski has argued; cf. Shelley Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). However, one of the tensions in KdF’s concept of joy is a tendency to present more passive amusements for its audiences to consume, if this is what those audiences appeared to want.)

<sup>18</sup> The preceding paragraphs already indicate some of the ‘joys’ that KdF pursued – points along the ideological axis, literal strength, cultural activity, improved working conditions, and so on — and all these will be evinced in the following chapters.

<sup>19</sup> *Alltagsgeschichte* [history of everyday life] emerged in (West-) Germany in the 1970s as history writing from “below.” On the concepts, and theory – as well as examples – of this approach, see Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); especially “What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3-40. A very useful overview is provided by Andrew Stuart Bergerson; see Andrew Stuart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim* (Bloomington [u.a.]: Indiana Univ. Press, 2004), 258–269. A useful review over past decades of *Alltagsgeschichte* research and suggestions for future scholarship is provided in Paul Steege et al., “The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter,” *Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 2 (June 2008): 358-378. For an early debate on writing the everyday history for the Third Reich, see Martin Broszat, *Alltagsgeschichte der NS-Zeit. Neue Perspektive oder Trivialisierung?* : *Kolloquium* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1984). While inspired by questions and approaches of *Alltagsgeschichte*, my work cannot provide a “history from below” of KdF due to the (non-)availability of appropriate sources.

KdF's diverse practices aimed at a day-to-day "joy production" for the German population – what exactly was done – how and when –, and what was the goal behind this? Many my sources, such as announcements and reports about the leisure organization, originated from the organization itself, or are themselves largely based on information released by the organization.<sup>20</sup> These sources clearly have to be considered Nazi propaganda. However, it would be unproductive to dismiss these sources as "mere propaganda." For, first, when read carefully, they allow us important insights into KdF's goals. Second, we can learn from these propaganda sources how KdF 'marketed' its work. For a historical analysis of these points, it is not necessary to know whether these propagandistic announcements were always realized, nor even, whether people believed such announcements at the time.<sup>21</sup> It is, also, important to note, that the German population was in fact subjected to this propaganda – it was part of their everyday experience and can be analyzed as such.

It is remarkable the extent these everyday experiences with KdF are omitted in personal accounts of the time, such as diaries, or post-war testimonies.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the lack of first-hand accounts about KdF's everyday practices (in sports or in the realm of culture,) in diaries, letters or memoirs, is rather stunning. The absence might be due to the

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to archival sources, most of them from the Federal Archives in Berlin (BArch), KdF sources consist of brochures and books published by the leisure organization. Furthermore, an important material base was the fortnightly magazine *Arbeitertum*, an official publication of the German Labor Front, KdF's parent organization, since 1933.

<sup>21</sup> Naturally, it is the historian's task in this context, to critically evaluate the source and to identify and contextualize any inaccuracies and exaggerations.

<sup>22</sup> The *Deutsches Tagebuch* Archive in Emmendingen [DTA], Germany, had only few diaries that mentioned KdF. Even more conspicuous was that KdF was hardly mentioned in interviews conducted as part of several oral history projects on the Third Reich. Transcripts of these interviews can be found in the archive "Deutsches Gedächtnis" in Lüdenscheid. [Archiv "Dt. Gedächtnis."]

fact that these events were perceived as too banal/quotidian to be mentioned. For post-war texts, it might be that people were careful not to stress positive experiences during the Third Reich, either because they were afraid of being perceived as Nazis or because they tried overall to stress the negative sides and atrocities of Nazi Germany, thus de-emphasizing or leaving out any “positive” aspects.

This analysis of KdF’s practices extends our understanding of Nazi methods for controlling and governing Germany’s society and its members. It also contributes to the literature on the practices and limits of a totalitarian state. While KdF’s ambitions can be characterized as totalitarian, its activities – in their execution, and impact – were certainly not. Partly, this was due to KdF’s overall principle of voluntary participation: taking part in all of KdF’s events was (generally) entirely optional and little or no pressure was applied in this regard by the leisure organization. KdF functionaries knew that their aspired “production of everyday joy” could only truly be realized if its activities were completely voluntary.

More importantly, KdF’s history reveals how totalitarian state like the Third Reich sometimes permitted – or even created – spaces of autonomy. In the case of KdF, it left spaces of autonomy, for example, for individual companies’ managements or individuals working class athletes. These then functioned as spaces where processes of individual, opportunistic adaptation could and did take place. Indeed, these spaces were almost never loci of resistance and were always rather spaces of adaptation that caused no real threat to either KdF or the Third Reich as a whole. KdF seem to have been content enough, if its goal of “production of everyday joy” was generally realized, even if this

occurred in part without its ‘hands-on’ micro management.<sup>23</sup>

*Kraft durch Freude* has remained a rather understudied area in the scholarship of Nazi Germany, both in the German and non-German historiography. There are two predominant, often overlapping features of the works on the KdF organization in the literature. First, most of the studies are part of a larger debate that scrutinizes the consent and coercion, support and resistance, of the working class in relationship to the Nazi regime. Second, many of the works on the KdF are mainly interested in just its travel department. My work certainly joins in and expands the debate about working class Germans. It also goes well beyond a focus on KdF’s tourism work by examining more day-by-day activities in the realm of sports and culture.

Studies about the working class in Nazi Germany almost always address KdF, although typically briefly. There are only a few works that deal exclusively with KdF. Two of them are dissertations. Laurence Van Zandt Moyer’s dissertation<sup>24</sup> provides a detailed chronological account of the KdF’s development and its socio-political aims. Moyer argues that the leisure organization was successful neither in winning the German

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<sup>23</sup> In this context, my dissertation supports – with reservations – older readings that saw the Nazi leisure organization’s function as that of “distraction.” (For a broader version of such an argument, according to which the Nazis employed entertainment to “distract” from its crimes, see Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein* (München, Wien: Hanser, 1983).) For, KdF, however, this, occurred in my opinion in a much more complex manner than previously argued by scholars. As discussed above, my argument is that KdF opened up spaces within the regime, which could also be occupied by those with latently opposed attitudes towards the regime or by “neutral” individuals or groups. I would argue that here, we can see what has been described by Alf Lüdtke as *Eigensinn*. This term refers to “willfulness, spontaneous self-will, a kind of self-determination, an act of (re)appropriating alienated social relations on and off the shop floor” in the analysis of workers’ everyday life. (Lüdtke, *History of Everyday Life*, 313.) Furthermore, I argue that this *eigensinnig* “usage” then in turn tied up energies and thus prevented more radical acts against the regime. In addition, I would also suggest that for some, leisure practices in these spaces led to an increase of their general well-being – this emergence of feelings of contentment was then a development favored by the Nazi regime.

<sup>24</sup> Laurence Moyer, “The Kraft Durch Freude Movement in Nazi Germany: 1933-1939.” (Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1968).

workers' support for National Socialism, nor in the construction of an egalitarian, undivided German nation or "racial community." In contrast to Moyer, Wolfhard Buchholz claims in his dissertation that KdF did to a certain extent help the Nazis integrate the German working class further into German society and the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>25</sup> His dissertation about the KdF, the standard work on the topic in German, stresses that KdF should be seen as meaningful and instrumental for the stabilization and persistence of the National Socialist regime. It furthered the integration of the workers into German society by regenerating their productivity and boosting motivation and ideological indoctrination.

In addition to these dissertations, there is one recent English monograph on KdF, which focuses, however, on KdF's Travel.<sup>26,27</sup> Shelley Baranowski's 2004 book *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* argues that KdF, and its

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<sup>25</sup> Wolfhard Buchholz, "Die nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude': Freizeitgestaltung und Arbeiterschaft im Dritten Reich" (Dissertation, Ludwig Maximilian University, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> There are a couple of works that deal with KdF's Travel specifically. Claudia Schallenberg's ethnographic study examines Germans' experiences on the KdF cruise ship; cf. Claudia Schallenberg, "KdF: 'Kraft durch Freude': Innenansichten einer Seereise" (Master Thesis, University Bremen, 2005). The focus on KdF's Travel is also pursued in the 1992 German dissertation by Bruno Frommann; cf. Bruno Frommann, "Reisen im Dienste politischer Zielsetzungen: Arbeiter-Reisen und 'Kraft durch Freude'-Fahrten" (Dissertation, University of Stuttgart, 1992). Overall, Frommann concurs with Moyer's diagnosis of a "non-successful" KdF. Frommann stresses that KdF trips, while having a political intent, remained apolitical enterprises and thus should be considered first and foremost as touristic events. Accordingly, Kristin Semmens's 2005 monograph deals with KdF tourism as a part of her overall examination of commercial tourism in Nazi Germany; cf. Kristin Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Semmens argues, however, that "tourism's real value was political;" (Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 12.) For KdF travel, she demonstrates that its "nazification" was highly dependent on locality; a trip to Berlin – with or without the KdF – was probably always more "political" as "a celebration of Nazism" than a KdF trip to the Black Forest would ever have been during the Third Reich. (Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 190.)

<sup>27</sup> Another section of KdF's work that has been treated in monographs is its program "*Schönheit der Arbeit*" ["Beauty of Labor."] [See Chup Friemert, *Produktionästhetik im Faschismus: Das Amt Schönheit der Arbeit von 1933 bis 1939*. (Munich: Damnitz Verlag, 1980).] This department is also the focus of Anson G. Rabinbach's 1976 article. Anson G. Rabinbach, "The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, no. 4 (October 1976): 43-74.

tourism especially, represented a way for the Nazis to both fulfill Germans' consumerist demands and to incorporate them in their imagined "racial community."<sup>28</sup> Baranowski's work thereby links Nazi politics with and within the KdF to a larger debate about National Socialism and modernity in general and the international movements towards Fordism and consumerism in particular. Yet to see KdF as first and foremost part of the Nazi answer to American consumer society,<sup>29</sup> is to miss the point. Rather, it was interested in a sort of "ideal enrichment" of the German population. My study shows that in general, KdF was not concerned with material values. Instead, it tried to counteract such desires with a more 'idealistic' effort towards a spiritually focused "joy production" – people should be made to *feel* more happy and joyful, through (collectively experienced) joyful activities rather than material or financial incentives.<sup>30</sup>

There seems to be a general consensus among historians that in establishing KdF the Nazis aimed to appease and win over the workers.<sup>31</sup> German workers participated in

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<sup>28</sup> See Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*.

<sup>29</sup> On the (failed) attempt by the Nazi regime to set up a consumer society, see Wolfgang König, *Volkswagen, Volksempfänger, Volksgemeinschaft: "Volksprodukte" im Dritten Reich. Vom Scheitern einer nationalsozialistischen Konsumgesellschaft* (Paderborn; Munich: Schöningh, 2004), 10. König also addresses KdF travel, which he sees as embodying an attempted consumer and leisure society, but which he also characterizes as an area where the dilemmas of this politics are visible; *ibid.* 12.

<sup>30</sup> It could be argued, however, that KdF was active in a sort of "joy marketplace," at least insofar as KdF tended to be responsive to its audience's demands. However, although KdF was in the business of providing occasions for joy, it also seemed to have assumed that its audience's participation in these occasions was important. This is visible both in the instrumental notion of strong workers and warriors being joyful workers and warriors – work and warfare are both activities – and in the precise fact of KdF's responsiveness: it was less inclined to try and persuade people to be joyful in its mode (to sell joy to them) than to do what they wanted to help produce joy. Of course, this often collapsed into fairly shallow and passive joy events, but it is more complicated than the mere trade of joy commodities. (See footnote 17 for more remarks on the relationship of KdF's concept of joy to the possibility of commodifying happiness.)

<sup>31</sup> This is seen in a wide array of scholarly articles about KdF which have been instrumental in providing me with ideas and material for my dissertation. Hermann Weiss's article describes the institutional structure of KdF, while Mathias Frese's article examines the KdF's work as part of the German Labor Front's efforts in the field of social and leisure politics; cf. Hermann Weiss, "Ideologie der Freizeit im Dritten Reich: Die NS-Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude'," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 33 (1993): 289-303; Matthias Frese,

KdF programs in great numbers. But KdF was about more than the working class. The scholarly debate on the role of the working class in the Third Reich is extensive and cannot be properly recapitulated here.<sup>32</sup> An important starting point was set by the ground-breaking work of Timothy W. Mason, who argued in his 1977 seminal work *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* that the worker-friendly policy of the Third Reich was created for opportunistic and political reasons, in the context of an ongoing class-struggle which determined the Nazi Germany's society and economy as a whole.<sup>33</sup> Mason was (for a long time) unconvinced about Nazi success in "winning over" German worker;<sup>34</sup>

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"Arbeit und Freizeit. Die Deutsche Arbeitsfront im Herrschaftssystem des Dritten Reiches.," in *Reaktionäre Modernität und Völkermord: Probleme des Umgangs mit der NS-Zeit in Museen, Ausstellungen und Gedenkstätten*, ed. Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Josef Jelich (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1994), 58-69. Nazi leisure activities in factories form the specific focus of Carola Sachse's work; cf. Carola Sachse, "Freizeit zwischen Betrieb und Volksgemeinschaft: Betriebliche Freizeitpolitik im Nationalsozialismus," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 33 (1993): 305-328. On KdF travel, Hasso Spode was prolific; cf. Hasso Spode, "'Der deutsche Arbeiter reist': Massentourismus im Dritten Reich," in *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit*, ed. Gerhard Huck (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1980), 281-306; Hasso Spode, "Fordism, Mass Tourism and the Third Reich: The 'Strength through Joy' Seaside Resort as an Index Fossil," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 127-155. On KdF Sports, Hajo Bernett has produced seminal work; cf., for example, Hajo Bernett, *Nationalsozialistische Leibeserziehung* (Schorndorf b. Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1966); Hajo Bernett, "Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport bei 'Kraft durch Freude'," *Stadion* 5, no. 1 (1979): 89-146. A somewhat brief, but very insightful article on a study conducted by KdF on women's participation in this organization is provided by Anson Rabinbach; cf. Anson Rabinbach, "Organized Mass Culture in the Third Reich: The Women of Kraft Durch Freude," in *The Rise of the Nazi Regime: Historical Reassessments*, ed. Charles S. Maier, Stanley Hoffman, and Andrew Gould (Boulder, London: Westview Press, 1986), 97-105. Rabinbach points to the fact that the survey suggests that the women would have preferred private over (KdF) organized leisure – one reason why the 1936 survey was never published (although Rabinbach suggests that such private spaces themselves would have helped accommodate women to the regime, in a manner not dissimilar to some of my own overall claims).

<sup>32</sup> For a useful summary and analysis of the debate up to 1989, see Ulrich Herbert, "Arbeitschaft im 'Dritten Reich'. Zwischenbilanz und offene Fragen," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 320-360.

<sup>33</sup> Timothy W. Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978). For the debate around Mason's thesis see, for example, David F. Crews, "General Introduction," in *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*, ed. David F. Crews (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-37.

<sup>34</sup> In a later essay, Mason reevaluated and qualified his original argument somewhat, conceding that there had been a "partial integration" of German workers into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. [See Timothy Mason, "Die Bändigung der Arbeiterklasse im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland: Eine Einleitung," in *Angst, Belohnung, Zucht und Ordnung: Herrschaftsmechanismen im Nationalsozialismus*, by Carola Sachse et al. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 47.]



but newer works have shed doubt on this position. Alf Lüdtke, for example, argues that the Nazis were rather successful in appealing to workers, both with material incentives and “symbolic offerings.”<sup>35</sup> KdF can be seen as one of these successful “symbolic offerings” by the regime.<sup>36</sup> I would argue, however, that this was more than a mere strategic or opportunistic move; KdF’s “symbolic offering” of bringing “joy” and fostering the “racial community” must be considered as integral to the Nazi ideology overall.

My dissertation joins a more recent, broader debate about the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>37</sup> At first glance, the Nazi concept of a “racial community” or *Volksgemeinschaft*, so central to their overall ideology, also features prominently in the major analyses of the Third Reich.<sup>38</sup> A more careful look reveals, however, that many of

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<sup>35</sup> See Alf Lüdtke, “What Happened to the ‘Fiery Red Glow’? Workers’ Experiences and German Fascism,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 207. Cf. also Alf Lüdtke, “‘Ehre der Arbeit’: Industriearbeiter und Macht der Symbole. Zur Reichweite symbolischer Orientierungen im Nationalsozialismus,” in *Arbeiter im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Klaus Tenefelde (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 343-392; and Alf Lüdtke, “The Appeal of Exterminating ‘Others’: German Workers and the Limits of Resistance,” *The Journal of Modern History* 64 (December 1, 1992): 46-67.

<sup>36</sup> Although less so a “material incentive,” as already expanded on above.

<sup>37</sup> Very recently, this debate has been augmented by an edited volume that aims to take “interim stock of a controversial debate”: Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, *“Volksgemeinschaft”: Mythos, wirkungsmächtige soziale Verheißung oder soziale Realität im “Dritten Reich”? Propaganda und Selbstmobilisierung im NS-Staat* (Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012). Schmiechen-Ackermann’s introduction provides an in-depth and up-to-date summary of the historiography related to the debate on *Volksgemeinschaft*. The volume also contains an article by Rüdiger Hachtmann looking at the German Labor Front and its daughter KdF as “service provider[s] for the *Volksgemeinschaft*,” cf. Rüdiger Hachtmann, “Volksgemeinschaftlicher Dienstleister? ‘Anmerkungen zu Selbstverständnis und Funktion der Deutschen Arbeitsfront und der NS-Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude,’” in *“Volksgemeinschaft”: Mythos, wirkungsmächtige soziale Verheißung oder soziale Realität im Dritten Reich? Zwischenbilanz einer kontroversen Debatte*, ed. Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 111-131.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Peukert’s study has two chapters dealing with the Nazi “racial community.” The book is especially strong in showing the “exclusive” character of this concept, emphasizing how it could only exist and be defined through those outside the community as “*Gemeinschaftsfremde*” [“Alien to the Community.”] Timothy W. Mason’s work on the German working class puts *Volksgemeinschaft* even into the titles of two of his works: Timothy Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und*

these older works do not actually engage with this term as a category of historical analysis. They either take it for granted, as yet another buzz word of Nazi propaganda,<sup>39</sup> or they dismiss it exactly on this ground, calling it a mere myth.<sup>40</sup> Only recently, has *Volksgemeinschaft* become a central category of analysis in interpretations of Nazi Germany, especially in the German-speaking scholarship.<sup>41</sup> My work joins a newer school of research that assumes that it was not merely a propagandistic term, but that “large parts of the German population considered the *Volksgemeinschaft* as desirable social goal,” even despite its definitional ambiguity.<sup>42</sup> As David Welch has pointed out, “‘belonging’ to such a community remained a powerful integratory force for many

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*Volksgemeinschaft: Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936-1939* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975); Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich*. The capitalist Nazis and their politics were, however, according to Mason, never embraced by the German workers, but rather encountered clear opposition from them. He asserts that a united and strong German *Volksgemeinschaft* including the working classes imagined and proclaimed by the Nazis was never actually established. I am not convinced by his argument about the non-existence of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*. This disagreement is a starting point for my dissertation

<sup>39</sup> Of course, there are also studies that explore this *Volksgemeinschaft* propaganda seriously; foremost among them David Welch, “Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People’s Community,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April 2004): 213-238.

<sup>40</sup> For example, cf. Heinrich August Winkler’s review of Mason’s *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich*: Heinrich August Winkler, “Vom Mythos der Volksgemeinschaft,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 17 (1977): 1-15.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to the previously mentioned volume by Schmiechen-Ackermann, Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt have published a very useful edited volumes with studies on the term and practice of the (Nazi) *Volksgemeinschaft*; cf. Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009). As Norbert Frei has pointed out, the first generations of post-war (mainly German) historians mostly perceived the *Volksgemeinschaft* both materially and in theory as a fictitious concept,” not seldom for political reasons. My dissertation aims to help overcoming the “deficits of historical research and depth on the *Volksgemeinschaft*” diagnosed by Frei and seeks to realize his plea to “take a serious look at how the *Volksgemeinschaft* was experienced by contemporaries.” [Norbert Frei, “People’s Community and War. Hitler’s Popular Support,” in *The Third Reich Between Vision and Reality: New Perspectives on German History, 1918-1945*, ed. Hans Mommsen (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 62 and 74.]

<sup>42</sup> Bajohr and Wildt, “Einleitung,” 9.

Germans.”<sup>43</sup> Many Germans considered KdF an element of this to-be-realized *Volksgemeinschaft* – KdF’s activities could give hope that the overall “racial community” would soon be fully realized. My presentation of KdF as a “partial fulfillment” of a larger promise, builds on work by Ulrich Herbert and Norbert Frei.<sup>44</sup> At least some contemporaries thought that KdF had realized (elements of) the creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft*. The leisure organization’s success functioned in this sense *pars pro toto* for the (future successes of the) *Volksgemeinschaft* and the Nazi regime overall.<sup>45</sup>

“Hitler’s Happy People” is divided into three parts; Part I traces KdF’s conceptions, Part II examines how these were implemented, diversified, and adapted to in its different areas of work; Part III analyzes its changes and continuities after the beginning of World War II. In the first part, entitled “KdF envisioned,” I explore KdF’s organization, its goals, and how they were to be realized through the various activities of

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<sup>43</sup> Welch, “Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft,” 238.

<sup>44</sup> See Ulrich Herbert, *Arbeit, Volkstum, Weltanschauung: Über Fremde und Deutsche im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1995), 95f.; Norbert Frei, *1945 und Wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), 122f.

<sup>45</sup> Through its focus on the experience of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, my dissertation engages in debates about consent, coercion, and public opinion. Here, I will build on and expand Robert Gellately’s insightful study *Backing Hitler*, which traces the establishing of a social consensus for the Nazi dictatorship after its coming to power; cf. Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Gellately demonstrates that the Nazis were successful in generating popular support. My dissertation aims to look at how KdF activities and everyday life practices, helped to establish such consent. On the topic of public opinion in the 1930s and 1940s in Germany, see also Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998); *Volkes Stimme: Skepsis und Führervertrauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006). To an extent, I also build here on Claudia Koonz’s study *The Nazi Conscience* which looks at different spheres of German society in the Third Reich, such as law, education, academia and medicine; cf. Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2003). Koonz traces how Nazi propaganda and ideology came to influence the values and thinking of “ordinary Germans” in all these areas. She argues that eventually a distinct “Nazi morality” reigned in the Third Reich, a set of values that replaced earlier moral systems and beliefs and thus enabled the regime to gain the support of the Germans to undertake their racist atrocities. I show that KdF helped to foster the building of such a “Nazi morality.” Certainly, the “positive,” productive and integrative ideas of National Socialism took center stage within the leisure organization.

its different departments. The second part, “KdF at work” contains three chapters. All of them look closely at KdF’s practices “on the ground,” in German factories (chapters two and three) and in the German countryside (chapter four – albeit more on the level of conceptualized practice). The dissertation’s last part, “KdF at War” examines KdF’s activities during World War II: chapter five analyses KdF’s entertainment for German *Wehrmacht* soldiers and activities in occupied Europe, while the last chapter looks at KdF’s activities on the German home front.

All chapters serve to support my overall argument of KdF’s joy-production overshadowing political indoctrination. Each chapter speaks to different aspects, causes, and effects of this process. The first chapter entitled “Strength and Joy for a Happy *Volksgemeinschaft*” describes how joy-production rather than political indoctrination was predicated both in KdF’s goals and the overall patterns of its actual work through its different departments. Uncovering the general practices and objectives of the leisure organization, I show how KdF aimed to realize and fortify the Nazi-envisioned concept of a harmonious “racial community” through its leisure offers. The German working class was the main target of such attempts, since it was believed by the Nazis to have an inherently oppositional attitude towards the “Third Reich.” This made the integration of German workers into a harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft* that transcended the boundaries of class and geography a central goal of the Nazi leisure organization. Based on an analysis of KdF’s goals and envisioned practices, I argue in chapter one that providing a satisfied, enjoyable and rather carefree life for the members of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* was central to the Nazis and their governance. To that end, KdF was responsible for putting the population into good humor and for granting enjoyment, especially through offering

cultural events of all kinds and initiating amateur art making, as well as securing the peoples' physical well-being, through its sports activities.<sup>46</sup> I demonstrate how KdF strongly emphasized a certain “fun factor” in its activities. Clearly, enjoyment – rather than ideological or political indoctrination – was to take center stage within the Nazi leisure organization.

My second chapter, “Nazi Fun Factories?” follows KdF into one of the main sites of its work, the shop floor. By examining the implementation and reception of KdF's activities in German industrial companies, I look at KdF's work “from below.” KdF's focus on joy – and the concomitant absence of political indoctrination – was connected to a limitation of KdF's role which could occur at times during the actual arrangements of leisure activities. This related to the resistance KdF had to face from companies' managements when it tried to enter the sphere of leisure. Individual factories and their leading employees ended up having a very large influence because they were the ones who actually organized the cultural events. This process, however, was still initiated by KdF, and, most crucially, the leisure events always corresponded to KdF's overall goal, the “production of joy.”

This specific configuration of the relation between KdF and the individual companies and their managements suggests that the Nazi regime's practice of governance and control was more “hands off” than some scholars have assumed. While KdF was always eager to operate in a totalitarian manner, this seems not to have always been possible for the organization. At the same time, a totalitarian presence did not seem to be

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<sup>46</sup> Here, I am in agreement with Götz Aly's thesis that Nazi Germany was a “*Gefälligkeitsdiktatur*” [“convenience dictatorship;”] my argument, however, as already explained above, does not refer to material values; cf. Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005).

necessary at all times for achieving KdF's aims. Overall, a process of adjustment and adaptation permeated its approach. In addition, KdF did indeed have a stabilizing effect for the Nazi regime. This was made possible in part by the way the organization separated itself both from direct indoctrination and from totalitarian practices. In this way, spaces were opened up both for German workers and for companies' managements, which had the appearance of relative autonomy. However, both groups ended up neither opposing nor even struggling against KdF's general ideals and goals. This allowed for the implementation or emergences of these ideals and goals, even without KdF's direct, hands-on involvement.

My third chapter expands the processes by which KdF opened spaces. "The Shop Floor as Gym for the *Volksgemeinschaft*." examines KdF sports programs and their implementation in German factories, especially the foundation of the so-called "Factory Sport Communities." Like the second chapter, chapter three analyzes KdF's practices "from below" in regards to developments in German companies, this time in the realm of sports. I show that here, too, KdF often remained in the background rather than appearing as the direct organizer of factory sports. Its goals, however, were usually achieved. Overall, I show in chapter three, that KdF's sports activities in Germany were dominated by the goal of "everyday joy production." In this regard, my work importantly challenges older research, which saw KdF sports predominantly as a paramilitary exercise and a specific preparation for an upcoming war effort. Some resistive acts used a so-called "Trojan-Horse" strategy to infiltrate KdF's sports events. As I will show, however, this opposition was not radical. Often all the energies of those who tried to resist were invested in keeping up a secure façade, so as not to be unmasked and detected.

Further, this “infiltration” was mostly motivated by the desire to do sports, and to continue doing so in a milieu of similar-minded people. With its sports offers within “Factory Sports Communities” and beyond, KdF opened up spaces to do this, especially for workers-athletes formerly organized in socialist associations.

Ironically, KdF’s “openness” helped it to enter German workers’ lives and everyday environments and furthermore helped to destroy their traditional milieus. KdF sports weakened German working class sports considerably, furthering its overall demise. In this manner, KdF’s activities influenced (some) German workers’ attitudes towards the Nazi regime. It seems that KdF managed to a certain degree to penetrate into workers’ professional and private lives, and that some workers supported the regime because of KdF’s work.

My fourth chapter plays the role of the exception that proves the rule. In “Beautiful Villages, Happy People,” I explore KdF’s activities in the German countryside for the rural population – more precisely, I look mostly at how the leisure organization conceptualized this work. KdF’s entry into the countryside occurred overall later than its permeation of the industrial world, and its activities for rural workers were driven by different concerns and fears than its activities for their urban counterparts. As I show, in rural Germany, KdF was involved in an effort to avert any ‘flight-from-the-land’ migrations of the rural population. This went hand in hand with an eagerness to disseminate and implement the Nazi blood-and-soil ideology. Nazi ideology was more strongly incorporated into KdF’s activities in the villages. Apparently, leisure organizers in the countryside were less concerned that excessively political content would scare off potential participants.

The fourth chapter highlights several trends and themes that characterize KdF overall. KdF's goal was to create and fortify a contented and solid community, both on local and national level. Other themes of KdF's work emerge in an intensified manner in the countryside. The organization's effort to civilize through leisure and its eagerness to invade all areas of the German population's private lives were particularly obvious in its efforts in the countryside. Overall, chapter four shows what KdF could have been: "production of everyday joy" was not that prominent among the leisure organization's activities in the countryside (compared to for events organized for urban audiences) and the organization was much more concerned about directly and openly disseminating and "realizing" Nazi ideology.

The last part of the dissertation, consisting of chapter five and six, examines KdF's work during World War II. Did KdF's tendency to focus on the production of joy, and its simultaneous abstention from the dissemination of political and ideological content, continue during the war? KdF changed little during the transition from peace and war. The older scholarly arguments that leisure events in the period from 1933 until 1939 should be mainly seen as a preparation for war – and that KdF played a correspondingly minor role once the war had started – are misguided. In contrast, KdF was eager to uphold its pre-war leisure infrastructure and to maintain its "production of everyday joy" throughout the war period. And it succeeded in these ambitions. Its main goal was to facilitate as happy and as fulfilled private lives for Germans as possible. KdF publications presented the realization of the goal of joy as one of the major reasons the war was fought.

Chapter five, "KdF's Warfare for Joy," examines KdF's involvement in the



entertainment of German *Wehrmacht* soldiers and of Ethnic Germans in newly-occupied regions. An analysis of this work and its reception highlights again the organization's strong focus on "mass-market appropriate," light-hearted entertainment, rather than on politically-tinged events or on those that could be categorized as "high-culture." Consistent with its prewar programming was that KdF sacrificed its commitment to "bring culture to the people" to its goal of "joy production." This was not an uncontested strategy and met with harsh criticism, for example from Joseph Goebbels and his propaganda ministry, who deemed many KdF events for soldiers too silly, tasteless, and even vulgar. KdF, however, was hardly deterred by this – the belief in the strength giving function of joy was too strong. During the war, the argument went, KdF was especially needed. The belief in joy can also be discerned in KdF's eagerness to export its leisure activities into areas newly-occupied because of the war. These events were mainly conducted for "Ethnic Germans" in these regions, in order to foster these persons' integration into the Nazi envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*. This export of leisure events as part of Nazis' occupation policies speaks to the centrality of KdF's "production of everyday joy" for the Nazi regime overall.

In addition to clearly demonstrating KdF's emphasis on "joy production" in a new light, chapter five also highlights KdF's eagerness to widely publicize its 'fun-centered' efforts and drive home their importance. In its propaganda during the war, KdF presented itself and its hired artists as vital comrades to the German front soldiers; KdF was the comrade who followed the soldier into the most remote and difficult areas in order to assist him by bringing joy and distraction. With this, the leisure organization claimed for itself an indispensable role in Germany's military campaign.

The dissertation's final chapter, chapter six, entitled "One must be able to enjoy oneself," explores KdF's work on the German home front during WWII, showing how the leisure organization continued its activities in this period, despite operating in the worsened conditions brought about by the war. My chapter will describe how KdF adapted its programs to the situation and, yet maintained its strong focus on light entertainment. Keeping up the German civilian population's morale and maintaining its spirit to (continue to) fight was now the leading goal. One could perhaps expect that this might have led to an increasing "politicization" of KdF's entertainment, but this was not the case; the organization kept its focus on light events which were apolitical in terms of content. KdF's commitment to the "production of everyday joy" in the midst of ruined cities and in bunkers was so determined that it apparently overshot the mark at times: some Germans perceived KdF's events as tasteless, disrespectful, and out of place during times when Germany was being bombed. Overall, during the war KdF's "joy production" escalated and was even accompanied by a new demand from KdF to the German population: they should display a certain willingness "to be entertained." Participation in and embracing of "happiness" was expected from each German as a part of his or her wartime civic duty. Only joy would secure a German victory in the war, which in turn would be the foundation for a "happy German people."

## PART I

“KdF envisioned”

CHAPTER ONE  
Strength and Joy for a Happy *Volksgemeinschaft*:  
The Work and Goals of KdF and its Departments

As in so many things, the Nazis were hardly very original when it came to establishing their leisure organization. KdF was modeled after *Dopolavro* [After Work], an Italian fascist leisure institution that had been in existence since the mid 1920s.<sup>47</sup> The parallels were obvious at KdF's founding on November 27, 1933. The Nazi organization was originally called *Nach der Arbeit* [After Work]. Soon it started to diverge significantly from its Italian predecessor. Rather than replicating the latter's corporatist design,<sup>48</sup> the Nazi leisure organization's offerings encompassed all sectors of industry (and beyond), in order to foster the Nazi idea of a unified community of all Germans.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>47</sup> Nazi leaders quite openly admitted this organization was the model for their own leisure project. (See Robert Ley, *Durchbruch der sozialen Ehre* (Berlin: Mehden, 1935).] Fully titled "Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro" (often shortened OND), the Italian leisure organization had been founded in May 1925. In her study of *Dopolavoro*, Victoria de Grazia calls it "a hybrid institution," which "was at one time or another a technocratic scheme, a fascist trade union recreation hall, a state regulatory agency, and a fascist party auxiliary." (Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 16.]

<sup>48</sup> There were, for example, specific *dopolavoros* for postmen, steelworkers, while also within the *dopolavoros* for one specific company, there were sections for different classes of employees, such as for example white-collar and manual workers – participation outside one's assigned group was not possible. In the sphere of leisure, and here KdF would build quite closely upon the Italian organization's blueprint, there were five main areas, including sports, education, folklore, trips and vacations, and welfare. (See Horst Dreßler-Andréß, *Die kulturelle Mission der Freizeitgestaltung* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1936), 6.) [All translations of German primary sources and secondary literature in this dissertation are by me.]

<sup>49</sup> Nazi propaganda repeatedly emphasized that KdF was a more successful leisure organization than *Dopolavoro*. An 1936 article, for example, proudly remarked that KdF had 35 million participants in the third year of its existence, while *Dopolavoro*'s membership, despite having been around much longer, was "only" at about 2 million people. (See Max Everwien, "Die Italiener erfassen nur 2 Millionen Menschen, KdF betreut 35 Millionen: Dopolavoro und 'Kraft durch Freude'. Andere Länder, andere Sitten," *Arbeitertum*, Feb.1, 1936, 17.) Despite such differences and explicit discursive dissociation from

newly-founded German leisure organization's ambition was to be more than just an "after-work" entertainment club. Its new name *Kraft durch Freude* reflected these ambitious goals.<sup>50</sup> It was deemed more appropriate to the totalitarian aspirations of the organization, which went well beyond simple after-work programs.<sup>51</sup>

KdF consisted of several departments; their set-up and overall number changed throughout the Third Reich.<sup>52</sup> Most important were the Departments of Travel, Sports,

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*Dopolavoro* on the part of the Third Reich, there was also a certain amount of cooperation between the two organizations. At a 1937 KdF convention, Horst Dreßler-Andres announced KdF trips to Italy, supported by *Dopolavoro*. (See BArch R 4902 /1029, pag. 1; "Reichsamtseiter Dreßler-Andres gibt Rechenschaft.-Deutsche Arbeiter werden nach Italien und Japan reisen," *Deutsches Nachrichten Blatt*, Jun. 12, 1937; see also Max Everwien, "Nachklänge von der KdF.-Fahrt nach Rom: Dopolavoro, Freizeitgestaltung in Italien," *Arbeitertum*, Nov. 15, 1937, 13-4.] In February 1938, an agreement between Robert Ley, KdF's head, and Achille Starace, Party Secretary of Italy's National Fascist Party, was signed, enacting an exchange of vacationers between Germany and Italy and their respective leisure organizations. (See BArch NS 22/ 551).

<sup>50</sup> Horst Dreßler-Andres, KdF's executive director from 1934 to 1938, explained in an interview from 1974 the genesis of the new title "*Kraft durch Freude*" as follows: "Within the Nazi Party, there was a forceful movement to do something, that is, to create something. This impulse [which came from the Italian leisure organization] was linked to the consideration whether it would be sufficient to have an operation that would take place only after work. The organization of leisure must encompass the entire productive life. [A worker] is a human being just like everybody else. More than before had to be offered to him. That is how the idea came into being that this would be no after-work organization. An all-round offer had to be created. This [thinking] resulted in [choosing] the title 'Strength through Joy.'" (IfZ Munich F 104; "Protokoll des Gesprches mit Herrn Dreßler-Andres am 22. Juli 1974 in Berlin-Karlshorst.") [All translations of German primary sources and secondary literature in this dissertation are by me.]

<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, this name underlined the organization's main goal of giving of strength and joy to the German people. During the special meeting of the German Labor Front at which KdF was founded, Adolf Hitler was credited for the leisure organization's inauguration; reputedly, Hitler had exclaimed: "Make sure for me, that the people keeps its nerve; since you can only do politics with a people that has strong nerves;"<sup>51</sup> Anatol von Hbbenet, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude": Aufbau und Arbeit* (Berlin: NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude," 1939), 2. [Unless otherwise noted, all translations of quotations from German texts are mine. With primary sources from KdF, I have attempted to carry over the somewhat stilted, even peculiar, style of many of the German originals.]

<sup>52</sup> BArch R 43 II/ 557; pag. 5; speech by Robert Ley on KdF from Nov. 27. 1933. Through the next months, however, and indeed throughout the entire duration of KdF's existence, the set-up of departments changed continuously. A 1934 booklet, for example listed eleven departments, of which three (Bursary, Department for Youth and Department for Press and Propaganda) represented joint departments with the German Labor Front. The other eight departments were the Department for Organization, the Educational Department, the Department for Cultural Affairs, the Department for Travel, Hiking, and Vacation under Bodo Lafferentz, the Department of Beauty of Labor, the Department for Self-Help and Settlement, the Sports Department, and the Department for Folklore and Homeland.

Leisure Time, Folklore and Homeland, the Institute for the Education of the German People, and the program “Beauty of Labor.” All of them shared KdF’s general goals. These goals were the creation and stabilization of the Nazi vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft* as well as what I will call “joy production” in this dissertation. The latter term refers to the fact that, as I argue, the leisure organization was genuinely and foremost engaged in providing “joy” for the German population. KdF’s founder and leader Robert Ley put this as follows:

In a word, we want to give back to the people the joy in life, their homeland and fatherland, so that he [sic] can go with newly strengthened nerves and health to his daily work, knowing that happy people are also people strong in faith and that faith and hope alone are affirming of life, and that it is alone the fanatical affirmation of life that enables a people to overcome all storms of life. [“Nach der Arbeit’: Das große Feierabendwerk der Deutschen Arbeitsfront,” *Arbeitertum*, December 3, 1933, 4.]

The leisure organization’s general principles formed the basis of its quest for “joy production” and “community building.” The first of these was voluntary participation; that is, taking part in KdF events was to be entirely optional. Such “freedom” seems surprising given our perceptions of the totalitarian character of the Third Reich. However, the initiators and organizers of KdF understood that their overall goals to achieve happiness, relaxation, and fun did not necessarily jibe well with forced attendance. Indeed, such a permissive attitude might have grown out of a strong belief in the genuine appeal of the KdF’s program to Germans, as well as the realization that acting to enforce attendance would take up too many resources.

Secondly, in addition to being run on a strictly voluntary basis, KdF’s programs were set up to be as much as possibly devoid of any direct political, National Socialist, content. This was clearly due to the leisure organization’s principal orientation towards

German workers. Workers were considered to be likely to be opposed to the regime, so establishing an apolitical tone to KdF's leisure events would ensure this clientele was not "scared off." Generally, KdF was mainly directed *at* workers and *against* working class associations, political parties and unions. This was both symbolized and realized through the fact that the leisure organization was a sub-department of the German Labor Front [*Deutsche Arbeitsfront* or *DAF*] and fully funded through it. Accordingly, every member of the Labor Front had the right to attend the leisure organization's events or use its facilities. This emphasis represents an attack on the former socialist trade unions, which the Nazis accused of not having had money for leisure since they, in the view of the Nazis, "wasted" their financial resources on funding strikes and other industrial action events. National Socialism, so the KdF organizers wanted to convey, was more committed to the workers' actual well-being, willingly using financial resources to pay for their leisure. Of course, all this was a rather cynical maneuver; after all, the Labor Front, and thus the KdF, was in fact largely financed with money confiscated from the former unions, which had been smashed by the Nazi dictatorship in spring 1933. Despite the worker-friendly publicity, in the Third Reich there was no longer a real representation of the workers, nor was there a political-economical system that would allow for industrial action – even though earlier grievances, such as the regulation of working-hours or higher salaries, had not been addressed.

A third goal of KdF's work, and especially of the happiness it envisioned to evoke, was activity. KdF writings emphasize that its leisure opportunities should contain, if at all possible, an active component. Only actively pursued leisure would truly lead to relaxation and eventually new strength. According to Nazi beliefs, only action could

re-energize tired, “empty” people:

Tiredness is a feeling of emptiness. In the process of work, force and nerve matter are used up. They cause the feeling of coldness and emptiness. We know that this emptiness of the soul and the body is not averted or filled up by putting the human being on a day bed and letting him stare at the ceiling, but only through feeding new nourishment to soul and body. [BArch R 43 II/557, pag. 4; “Kraft durch Freude. Kundgebung der Deutschen Arbeitsfront. Dr. Ley über die Feierabend- (sic) ‘Nach der Arbeit.’”]

Nazism held work in the highest esteem, and, not very surprisingly, its conception of leisure contained that element, too. True happiness could only emerge from work and diligence. Thus, KdF encouraged Germans to make “good use” of their leisure time, and to spend it in an active manner, doing sports, producing art, participating in cultural performances, or learning new things via KdF’s educational branch. Related to this promotion of “activity” was KdF’s belief that after the Weimar Republic’s mismanagement and negligence of Germany’s culture and, in particular, cultural and folk heritage, there was an urgent need that these be renewed. However, according to Nazi ideology, this could only be accomplished by the German people themselves. A truly German cultural sphere had to be newly produced, building on the input of the German *Volk*. KdF’s leisure offerings therefore had the clear goal to motivate and equip Germans for this task; a task which was understood to be indispensable and vital for Germany’s present and future.<sup>53</sup>

The fourth general feature of KdF’s work is “collective experience.” The leisure organization worked on the assumption that the happiness it sought to produce amongst Germans was to be communally experienced joy. This belief in and eagerness to foster

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<sup>53</sup> See BArch NS 5 I/ 365; “‘Kraft durch Freude’: Kundgebung für Volkstum und Heimat,” *Der Angriff*, 32



collective happiness – rather than individual joy – was of course closely tied to the Nazi vision of a harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft*, whose construction and solidification was, beside “joy production,” KdF’s second main goal. Given that “joy” and the resulting “strength” were intrinsically linked to communal experiences in its thinking, one important feature of KdF’s leisure activities was “community.” Germans should spend their leisure time together with others, pass their after-work time in groups beyond the traditional family setting, enjoying together a play, a concert or another artistic performance. These shared activities would lead to some sort of communally experienced joy, either during or after the event. In 1936, Horst Dreßler-Andreß, then KdF’s chief executive officer, explained that KdF’s work would avoid “the atomizing effect of spending one’s leisure time individualistically [*individualistische Freizeitverbringung*,] which is not following the natural life form of a social community, that is the community of the people.” Dreßler-Andreß granted that this might seem to contradict individualist definitions of freedom, but went on to explain that KdF’s conception would in fact embody a “real definition of freedom,” one that allowed “individuals the practical freedom to unfurl their talents and abilities and through this would serve their people.”<sup>54</sup> There seems to be a somewhat curious “philosophical” claim here that the free individual will only want to serve his people.<sup>55</sup> But given that claim, we can see how to entertain and to enhance individuals is automatically thought to be productive and useful for the community overall. Germans should benefit from KdF’s after-work events, they should

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Feb. 12, 1934.

<sup>54</sup> Dreßler-Andreß, *Die kulturelle Mission der Freizeitgestaltung*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Perhaps, not that curious – consider Christian ideas of selflessness. However, the only relevant

enjoy and become enriched – and then they were supposed to act on that, to release the newly-acquired energies to act creatively themselves, to become artistically active, to participate more in community events – all this in the end to further and strengthen the envisioned German *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The Nazis presented their concept of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft* as the only possible way to both overcome class conflict and create a desirable situation for the workers and for all Germans.<sup>56</sup> Although fulfilling some Socialist demands and even labeling their policies “socialist”, the Nazis made clear that their concept of “racial community” varied greatly from Utopian communities imagined as part of the Communist ideology. Robert Ley put this as follows:

A National Socialist community differs from the Bolshevik collective because in our community everybody has his place; our community has a goal. [...] We want Germany's unity. We do not want the mishmash of a Bolshevik collective, but a living community, arranged according to ability, and educated for struggle and life. [Robert Ley, *Deutschland ist schöner geworden* (Munich: F. Eher, 1939), 226 ff.]

We see here that Ley recognized a similarity between his National Socialist goals and those of socialism more orthodoxly understood. This is why the distinction from Bolshevik socialism needs to be made so strenuously. But we also see in this text and in

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individuals here are German, and they will only want to serve the German people.

<sup>56</sup> As David Welch points out, the Nazis, when addressing the workers, “chose to appeal to abstract emotions like pride and patriotism and focus less on the worker and more on the ennobling aspects of work itself.” (David Welch, “Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People's Community,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (April 2004): 213-238. Moreover, workers and their daily life and “struggle” were idealized and elevated – a Nazi slogan advertising the 1937 DAF fair in Berlin read “In the future there will be only aristocracy – the aristocracy of Labor.” (See Ronald M Smelser, *Robert Ley: Hitler's Labor Front Leader* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), image nr. 6.). Hitler was called the “first worker of the nation.” Despite this Nazi courtship of the workers, their urgent preoccupation with improving working conditions and dissolving class boundaries, it must be reiterated that the regime was interested in integrating the workers into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and in positioning them on a level of equality, but not giving them a leading role in society.

other writings that the *Volksgemeinschaft* was not only different to a Bolshevik collective, but also how central it was to Nazi ideology. The “racial community” was a necessary condition for a successful outcome in the struggle in which the Nazis imagined Germany to be engaged. According to the Nazis’ social-Darwinist worldview, the German *Volk* had to be strengthened as much as possible – otherwise its survival in a hostile and violent world would be impossible.<sup>57</sup>

One of KdF’s most prominent branches was its *Sportamt* [Sports Department.] Both the building and strengthening of the *Volksgemeinschaft* were in the center of KdF’s sports activities arranged through this department. Within general Nazi ideology, physical strength can be identified as a core “value.” In line with this general orientation, one of the main concerns of KdF was “strengthening the body” of each German. In this, the

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<sup>57</sup> Boaz Neumann points out that the Nazis were obsessed with the phenomenon of “life” and struggle for life and living space: “Concerning a political and social system so obsessed with murder and extermination, a regime which is identified more than any other with the production of death technology, it is peculiar to discover that one of the most commonly used words in these texts is life. The Germans were called upon to stimulate and strengthen the life of the people, to gather the force of life, to expand into a living space, to win in the struggle for life, etc. This word was indeed one of the most common in official Nazi language.” (Boaz Neumann, “The Phenomenology of the German People’s Body (Volkskörper) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body,” *New German Critique* 36, no. 106 (Winter 2009): 111.) Robert Ley continued the above cited statement with the following words, revealing his starkly existential and self-protective sense of being fundamentally threatened: “Germany must understand: We are a castle, and the burghers in this castle are welded together and sworn in. All bridges to the liberalist [sic] world are burned. Germany must live, because we want to live. *Heil Hitler!*” (Robert Ley, *Deutschland ist schöner geworden* (Munich: F. Eher, 1939), 250.) With his castle metaphor, Ley may be alluding to the “*Burgfriedenpolitik*” of First World War Germany. In 1914, at the beginning of the war, Emperor Wilhelm II had declared: “I recognize no parties, but only Germans.” On the continuities and differences between this policy and the one of the Nazis, see David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 53. In this way, Ley would strengthen his characterization of Germany as being in a permanently warlike situation (even before the war), of a Germany that has to be forever on its guard as it is surrounded by a hostile world. Additionally, he may be recalling Martin Luther’s famous words “A mighty fortress is our God” (“*Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott.*”). By alluding to this hymn, Ley attributes an almost religious power to Nazi ideology, raising it to the rank of an *ersatzreligion* or “political religion.” (Cf., for example, Eric Voegelin, *Die Politischen Religionen* (Munich: Fink, 1993).; George Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975). Emilio Gentile, “Facism as Political Religion,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3, J (1990): 229-251. This can be seen as further evidence for the Nazi attempt to integrate the workers in a *Volksgemeinschaft* of a mythical kind.

leisure organization's work was quite attuned to the overall goals of the "Nazi revolution," and pursued Hitler's "highest ideal [of the] human type of the future, where a radiant mind is found in a magnificent body."<sup>58</sup> In particular, sports were considered the ideal means to achieve "recovery, fortification, the breeding of our race, a deeply-stalwart [*urkräftigen*] German *Volk*."<sup>59</sup> Thus, in the field of sports, KdF's practices were clearly attuned to Nazi ideology: the strength gained from sports would better enable Germans to fend off the dangerous inferior races. KdF organizers argued that "sports and games were of decisive importance [...] for the day-by-day struggle for existence and the productive capacity of a nation."<sup>60</sup> Sports were to be a means to improve Germans' bodies in order to assist the overall strength of the German nation, physically and spiritually. KdF sports primarily intended to invigorate the collective *Volkskörper* – a notion incorporating both the German national body, and each German's individual body.<sup>61</sup> Strengthening this would bring about the fortification of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In other words, this program of strengthening would enable the individual German and the German

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<sup>58</sup> Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude, *Leibesübungen mit Kraft durch Freude* (Berlin: Reichssportverl., n.d.), 7.

<sup>59</sup> Bruno Malitz, *Die Leibesübungen in der nationalsozialistischen Idee* (Munich: Eher, 1933), 50.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Stemmer, "The Organization of Leisure Time of German Workers Through the National-Socialist Fellowship Kraft Durch Freude," in *World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation, German Addresses for Committee[s] I-XI* (Rome, 1938), 5 [Published in English.].

<sup>61</sup> On the more detailed definition and historiography of the term "*Volkskörper*" and its role in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* as well as its relation towards the Jewish "foreign body" ("*Fremdkörper*"), see Boaz Neumann's insightful article. (Neumann, "The Phenomenology of the German People's Body (*Volkskörper*) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body.") Conducting a phenomenological study when examining Nazi body politics, Neumann argues "I have assumed "that the *Volkskörper* was perceived, understood, and experienced in the Nazi world as a real, concrete body" and "should not [...] be looked on as "something else," as a symbol or metaphor of the body, a corporeal expression of the mythic or atavistic, or an expression of organicist visions of the state, society, and population." (Neumann, "The Phenomenology of the German People's Body (*Volkskörper*) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body," 178.)

*Volksgemeinschaft* as a whole to realize their potential as the superior race. And of course, this strength, once fully formed, would be unleashed in the Second World War.

KdF's *Sportamt* was certainly linked to preparations for a German war effort than the KdF *Sportamt*. Germany's male bodies were to be strengthened and steeled so that they would be ready and primed for their coming fighting assignments. Germany's female bodies, too, had to be prepared, to be strong enough to sustain increased demands they might have to face in German factories, substituting the male workers who would be away at the front.<sup>62</sup> However, it would be wrong to consider KdF's sports merely as a form of war preparation; KdF's Sports was equally – if not more – involved in KdF's overall goal of “joy production.” It is important to note that “joy production” and “war preparation” were not at odds for KdF. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that in its programs, “Happy Gymnastics” or amusing exercises such as “building a snowman” would appear right beside the discipline of “hand grenade distance throwing.”<sup>63</sup>

Generally, the *Sportamt* was responsible for sports and games. It started its work with a focus on gymnastics, swimming and track-and-field.<sup>64</sup> Eventually, however, other

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<sup>62</sup> Of course, strengthening women's bodies was also to foster their ability to bear (many) children to further build up the *Reich*.

<sup>63</sup> See *Wintersporttag der Betriebe 1942 ein großer Erfolg: Erfahrungsbericht des Sportamtes der NSG "Kraft durch Freude"*. (Berlin, 1942). and NWA 2 Nr. 9922.

<sup>64</sup> Although an integral part of KdF, the Sports Department had an “external” leader, the *Reichssportführer* (Reich Sport Leader), Hans von Tschammer und Osten. Born in 1887 and having served in World War I, von Tschammer und Osten, a member of the German *Junker* class, joined the Nazi party as well as the *SA* (Storm troopers) in 1929, where he rose to the rank of *SA-Gruppenführer*. In March 1933 he became a member of the *Reichstag* for the Nazi party. Despite having played no major role in German sport (organization) until that point, he was appointed *Reichssportkommissar* and *Reichssportführer* in April 1933. (See Wolfgang Benz, Hermann Graml, and Hermann Weiß, *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 889. For a documentation of NS sports and sport politics, see Hajo Bernett, *Nationalsozialistische Leibeserziehung* (Schorndorf b. Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1966). That KdF sports were made part of the *Reichssportführer*'s responsibilities was due to the concern for a unity in German sports.

kinds of sports were offered, too: a 1936 KdF sports brochure boasted there was practically no kind of sport which was not offered.<sup>65</sup> KdF functionaries credited their Sports Department with strengthening the energies and performance of the workers and eventually of the entire *Volk*. Robert Ley's enthusiastic and somewhat over-emphatic description of this task and target warrants quotation at length:

Among the KdF departments, the sports department plays a particularly important role. It has the noble, but also indefinitely difficult task, of making the leisure time of the German worker within the leisure-time organization a source of strength through recreation that produces joy. Thus, it greatly contributes to boosting the life energies and the performance of the people. Through education and training it takes part in the unified formation and creation of the German man, whose ideal resides in the harmony of body, mind and soul. For the sports department, physical exercises are not only a means to keep the body healthy and fresh, but also the foundation for mentally and spiritually healthy interior development. That is why its exercise courses attach particular importance to educational, personality-building moments and thus have a deeper sense than mere physical exercise. [Ley, *Deutschland ist schöner geworden*, 94.]

Ley stresses here that KdF's overall concern with sports was directed towards the energy and strength of the individual German man or woman.<sup>66</sup> We can also detect an intention

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"Centralizing" the KdF Sports department, however, can also be read as evidence for the key role sports played in the Third Reich, beyond the sphere of the leisure organization.

<sup>65</sup> Reichsportamt der NS.-Gemeinschaft KdF, ed., *KdF-Sport im Bild* (Berlin, 1936), 2. According to a KdF publication, participation numbers in KdF sport activities rose from 630,000 in 1934 to 3.5 million in 1935, then reaching approximately 6 million in the first half of 1936. (See Reichsportamt der NS.-Gemeinschaft KdF, *KdF-Sport im Bild*, 1.) Participation in *Sportamt's* activities was available to anybody who was in possession of a *Jahressportkarte* (Annual Sport Ticket), a document that resembled a kind of passport in which the participation in classes and the paid fees were noted down. (See BArch NS 20/48.) These *Jahressportkarten*, despite being a record for performance, stated the non-competitive character of KdF. Their inside cover included a statement by Robert Ley: "It is not our goal to raise matadors; we solely want to have healthy and happy people in the factories. Then to have a healthy people is 90 % of the solution of the whole social question." Jews, however, were excluded from all KdF sport from 1935 on. (Hajo Bernett, "Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport bei 'Kraft durch Freude'," *Stadion* 5, no. 1 (1979): 102.) A photograph from 1935 gives further proof of KdF's anti-Semitism. It displays a group of people in front of a sport field and a Nazi supporter in (SA?) uniform holding up a sign which announces that there would be no more KdF sports on this field, since it was accessible to Jews, too. (See Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image No. 30011467.)

<sup>66</sup> This is in contrast to the perspective of von Tschammer und Osten. He emphasized that nothing other than Germany's interests, which for him equaled National Social interests, lay behind the necessity to do sports: "Today in Germany, physical exercises are not pursued for their own sake, but always with an

to realize a notion of holism, an attempt to strengthen and harmonize both body and soul. This view of sports seems to be why, KdF distanced itself from pushing particular individuals to improve themselves physically and reach new records. As Nazi sport functionary Bruno Malitz put it: “There is no sport as end in itself with us, no struggle for the mere sake of winning records.”<sup>67</sup> KdF Sports’ focus was not on the single individual; instead it wanted to motive the masses to exercise in order to enhance overall health. Robert Ley’s slogan in this context was allegedly: “It is not about how far somebody jumps – but that he jumps.”<sup>68</sup> KdF presented sports as a means to improve the body to assist the overall strength of the German nation, both physically and spiritually. In other words, doing sports acquired an importance beyond the individual (body); for KdF, it was

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awareness of fulfilling duties towards National Socialist ideology.” (Hans von Tschammer und Osten, quoted in Hans Winkler, *Legenden um Hitler: “Schöpfer der Autobahnen, ” “Kraft durch Freude” für den Arbeiter, “ ”Überwinder von Versailles, “ ”Vorkämpfer Europas gegen den Bolschewismus.”* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1961), 34.

<sup>67</sup> Malitz, *Die Leibesübungen in der nationalsozialistischen Idee*, 18. However, despite the recurring downplaying of individual records and the struggle for performance, there was of course also such thinking regarding sport on the part of the Nazis. This becomes especially obvious in 1936 during the Olympic Games, but can also be traced in KdF’s Sports Department, which introduced already in 1933 the *Reichssportabzeichen*, an honorary badge that could be gained for having successfully performed a requisite amount of specified exercises within one year. According to Robert Ley, there were 35,000 *Reichssportabzeichen* awarded in 1933-34, and already 160,000 in 1934-35. (See BArch NS 22/ 781.) The numbers appear to have risen; a statistic for the Westfalen-Nord *Gau* alone states there were 6,500 and 11,800 people enrolled in preparatory courses for the badge in 1936 and 1937 respectively. (See Werner Scholle, *Vier Jahre Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft Kraft Durch Freude Im Gau Westfalen-Nord* (Berlin: Deutsche Arbeitsfront, 1939), 19. Furthermore, KdF organized competitions within and between companies. Peter Reichel highlights that “KdF sport more and more became competitive sport” and points to the clear connection between the regime’s propaganda for more sports and its increasing preparation for an impending war. Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1992), 261f.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Karl Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad* (Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1938), 162f. This general idea of non-competitiveness was also stated in each of KdF’s Annual Sport Tickets, the aforementioned *Jahressportkarte* (Annual Sport Ticket.) These *Jahressportkarten*, despite being a record for performance, included the following statement by Robert Ley in its inside cover: “It is not our goal to raise matadors; we solely want to have healthy and happy people in the factories. Then to have a healthy people is 90% of the solution of the whole social question.” (See BArch NS 20/48.)

to become each German's "duty to his people."<sup>69</sup>

Thus, sports were to mostly function for the sake of the community. By motivating the individual German to do sports, the Nazis hoped to eventually strengthen the entire German nation, or *Volkgemeinschaft*. KdF brochures pointed to the proportional relationship between a "people's health and vital strength" and this people's members. Exercising would thus not only benefit the individual, but more importantly directly contribute to "the strength and health of the nation and helping to make its future secure." Sports was in this logic enhancing the individual's value to the community: "This individual whose body, mind, and spirit are harmoniously developed will never be a burden on the community but will always be a useful member of all the interests [sic] which serve the community."<sup>70</sup>

But the function of sports was not only to strengthen the *Volkgemeinschaft* by strengthening each of its members. It was also to help to create this community in the first place, by having people from all social strata doing sports together. This led to the Sports Department's increasing emphasis on introducing workers to disciplines that earlier had been rather exclusively for the upper-classes, such as tennis, golf, horse-riding or sailing.<sup>71</sup> In doing this, the Sports Department was also directly involved in KdF's undertaking to help German workers overcome their being excluded from the higher classes and their leisure activities. Thus, through sports KdF attempted to create a

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<sup>69</sup> Malitz, *Die Leibesübungen in der nationalsozialistischen Idee*, 18. Malitz also stated the Nazis were involved in a project to "plant sports again into the spiritual earth of folklore [*in die seelische Erde des Volkstums*]." (Ibid.)

<sup>70</sup> Stemmer, "The Organization of Leisure Time," 5 [Published in English].

<sup>71</sup> See Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 170f.; and Rudolf Kratsch, "Auch ein Beitrag zur sozialen Frage. Ein



community of all Germans, the creation of a socially-unified *Volksgemeinschaft* in mind. *Reichssportführer* von Tschammer und Osten put this as follows: “In the future, there will be no more middle-class and proletarian sports [...] only German sports for all the



**Middle-Class Sports for Workers:** Fig 1.1 (left): KdF horse-riding class (*Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 170;) Fig 1.2 (right): Tennis with KdF (*Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 165.)

people.”<sup>72</sup> We can see here, how the Sports Department, as all of KdF, was especially concerned to reach German workers. This meant that it was also engaged in transforming the shop floor into a space of leisure.<sup>73</sup> It promoted the building of swimming pools, sports fields and exercise rooms on the grounds of factories.<sup>74</sup> The images below illustrate such activities.<sup>75</sup>

Propaganda brochures for KdF and other Nazi organizations can be read to delineate Nazism’s obsession with the body and physical strength. They are full of

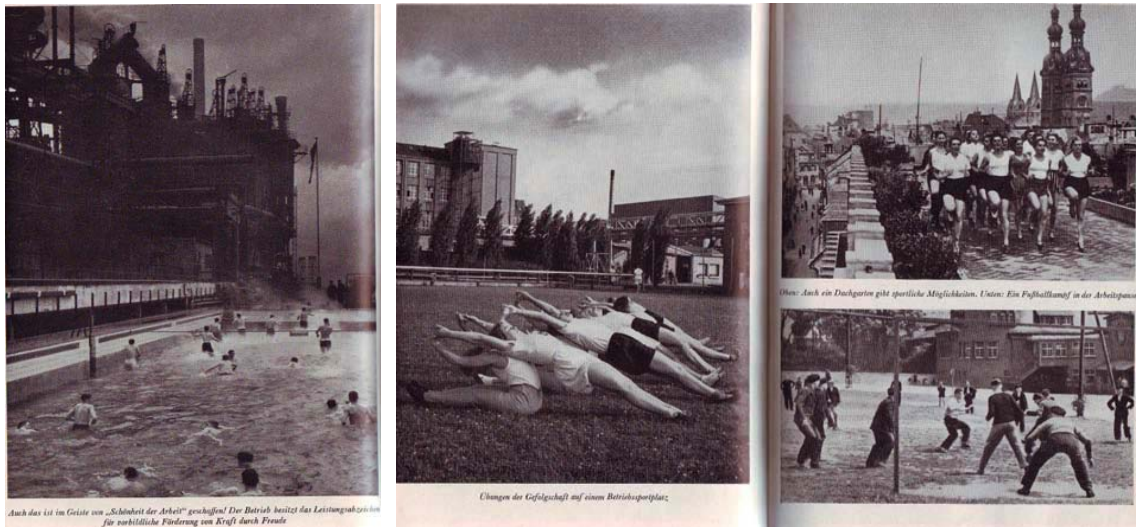
Volk treibt Sport in der NS-Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude,’” *Arbeitertum*, Oct. 15, 1935, .1.

<sup>72</sup> Hans von Tschammer und Osten in *Der Angriff*, Jul. 9, 1935, 4; quoted after Laurence Moyer, “The Kraft Durch Freude Movement in Nazi Germany: 1933-1939.” (Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1968), 104f.

<sup>73</sup> This occurred often in cooperation with KdF’s program “Beauty of Labor,” which I will discuss later in this chapter. KdF’s activities in the area of sports in factories will then form the focus of analysis of chapter three.

<sup>74</sup> However, KdF often did not carry the financial burden for these innovations; instead, the companies were made to pay for this out of their private funds. (See Reichsportamt der NS.-Gemeinschaft KdF, *KdF-Sport im Bild*, 1.)

beautiful, strong, healthy “Aryans.” Most of the pictures, such as the ones above and below, show people exercising in groups, thus emphasizing the communal aspect of the happiness KdF wanted to achieve. The communality might very well be understood as a prerequisite to such happiness.



**Sports in Factories:** Fig. 1.3 (left) A swimming pool for factory workers (*Das Taschenbuch Schönheit der Arbeit*, 178;) Fig. 1.4 (right) Factory Sports with KdF (*Ibid*, 174-5.)



**KdF Sports and the Body of the German Women:**  
Fig. 1.5 Female factory Sports Group (*Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 170.)

The strength of a unified German “racial community” in its mass character is displayed at the same time, something which was most clearly symbolized when the individual became a tiny part of a huge choreography. The picture above also points to the question

<sup>75</sup> Chapter three of this dissertation will explore in more detail KdF’s sports offerings on the shop floor.

about the role of women in KdF sports.<sup>76</sup> Originally, some programs of the Sports Department were only directed at men, and were only gradually opened to women. By 1936, however, there were more women than men taking part in KdF sport classes (60% women, 40% men.)<sup>77</sup> Many pictures in KdF brochures show men and women doing sports side by side. With such co-ed sports activities, KdF organizers might have wanted to support yet once more the image of an undivided, harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft*. Despite such ostensible equality, however, KdF made a clear distinction when it came to gender in the field of sports. The goals behind sports activities for men and women differed according to KdF publications. Exercise was good for women, indeed necessary for their health, and that of their (future) offspring. It was the latter that KdF was truly worried about, much more than about the women directly. Advertisements for the offerings of the Sports Department make sure to identify some of the young women as mothers. Brochures often contained photographs showing women with children, and captions reveal KdF's predominant concern for promoting sports for women: "Where mothers play with their children, a happy and strong race [*Geschlecht*] will grow."<sup>78</sup> The mother, or mother-to-be, was KdF's object, not the woman. KdF's gender conception is

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<sup>76</sup> Many of the pictures used by KdF to advertise their sports activities, such as the one above, show young women, and it is not too far-fetched to suspect that "sex sells" seems to have been a consideration amongst KdF publicists. (Cf. Udo Pini, *Leibeskult und Liebeskitsch* (Munich: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1992). On a first glance, this appears to be counterintuitive given Nazism's reputation for being a sexually repressive society. Dagmar Herzog's book *Sex after Fascism* has already demonstrated that such a reading of the Third Reich, however, would be misleading, pointing out that the regime's attitude toward sexuality was indeed a complicated one, but certainly not merely repressive; cf. Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>77</sup> See Michaela Czech, *Frauen und Sport im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland: Eine Untersuchung zur weiblichen Sportrealität in einem patriarchalen Herrschaftssystem* (Berlin: Tischler, 1994).

<sup>78</sup> See Reichsportamt der NS.-Gemeinschaft KdF, *KdF-Sport im Bild*, 1.

clearly a conservative one, and it does not treat women and men equally, despite a plethora of advertisement pictures which seems to suggest otherwise.<sup>79</sup>

As shown, KdF's Sports Department was involved in various, interrelated undertakings to foster and strengthen the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which ranged from physical strengthening of bodies to the arrangement of collective activities, combining both women and men and members of different classes. KdF's most prominent department, both in contemporary reception and later, in the post-war memories of many Germans, was also heavily involved in this undertaking to create community. This was the Department *Amt für Reisen, Wandern und Urlaub* [Travel, Hiking and Vacation,] or, more briefly, the Travel Department.

The Travel Department focused on organizing inexpensive trips of varied length, within Germany and beyond.<sup>80</sup> Weekend trips to German destinations constituted the majority of the offerings, while (several) week-long cruise trips on ships of the "Strength-through-Joy-Fleet" to European sites, (Portugal, Madeira, Norway, Italy, etc.)

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<sup>79</sup> This 'special' treatment of women – recalling Hitler's "two-spheres" dictum regards women and men – is clarified by Nazi sport theoretician Bruno Malitz in the following statement: "We National Socialists dismiss sports for women, we approve of gymnastic exercises [*Leibesübungen*] for them. We fight against sport for women, because it deforms, decomposes, destroys. We demand gymnastic exercises, without struggle and without training. The woman remains womanly. (Malitz, *Die Leibesübungen in der nationalsozialistischen Idee*, 36 ff.) Corresponding with this disapproval of women's performances in sports, Antje Fenners' book on the history of female track and field in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does not mention KdF at all – it played no role. (Cf. Antje Fenner, *Das erste deutsche Fräuleinwunder: Die Entwicklung der Frauenleichtathletik in Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zum Jahr 1945* (Königstein: U. Helmer, 2001).)

<sup>80</sup> This popularity is also reflected by the fact that most of the scholarly literature about the Nazi leisure organization focuses mainly or solely on its travel department. Cf. Shelley Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Bruno Frommann, "Reisen im Dienste politischer Zielsetzungen: Arbeiter-Reisen und 'Kraft durch Freude'-Fahrten" (Dissertation, University of Stuttgart, 1992); Claudia Schallenberg, "KdF: 'Kraft durch Freude': Innenansichten einer Seereise" (Master Thesis, University Bremen, 2005).

or worldwide (such as Libya in Africa) were among the most popular.<sup>81</sup> As was common to all of KdF's departments, the Travel Department, too, mainly targeted workers as potential participants, claiming to open new possibilities to workers that had been formerly unavailable to them.<sup>82</sup> KdF publications presented its organized vacations as important tools for strengthening the worker, both physically and mentally. Taking the worker off his everyday treadmill was to boost his subsequent energy and later performance: "And how refreshed in body and soul the worker returns to his home where he can ponder on his experiences and consolidate his impressions."<sup>83</sup> Workers' trips to different (German) landscapes would also lead to the worker's harmonization with nature, would make him whole again, overcome the estrangement caused by the modern world and allow the worker to deal with its shortcomings:

Millions of workers became other people through this deed. The man, who works in a plant or under the earth, gets in contact with the greatness of nature, this mighty power, which solves every riddle of the world. Once in the great outdoors, people find themselves again, they see again their deep roots, which connect each child of the earth inseparably to the course of the world. [Karl Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad* (Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1938), 92f.]<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The participation numbers in such KdF trips rose from 2 million in 1934 to over 9 million in 1936; Tim Mason gives a figure of over 10 million Germans participating in KdF cruises in 1938 alone. See Werner Kahl, *The German Worker Sees the World* (Berlin, 1940), 39; Timothy Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the National Community* (Providence: Berg, 1993), 160.

<sup>82</sup> However, in the realm of travel, there was an obvious discrepancy between Nazi propaganda and reality. Only a small part of the participants in KdF trips actually belonged to the working class. (See Winkler, *Legenden um Hitler*, 34.)

<sup>83</sup> Kahl, *The German Worker Sees the World*, 20.

<sup>84</sup> This passage illustrates the anti-modernist undertone that was a core component of National Socialist politics, even in the field of policing "modern" areas, such as the modern working population. In their belief in the necessity to re-unite the workers with nature, to re-connect them to a sphere that was reputedly lost for this group, the Nazis continued the discourse of the German Romantics and their longing for wholeness. Baranowski also mentions Romanticism in her discussion of *KdF* travel. She argues that with their specific way of appropriating Romantic *topoi*, they managed to combine the traditional and the modern: "Strength through Joy's selection of domestic tourism as a "modern" practice exploited the Romantic awe of nature [...] even as it downplayed the perils of nature that the Romantics had found so captivating. Like modern tourism generally, KdF tourism exposed its participants to the sublime and novel

The way KdF travel was conducted displays its underlying concern of fostering community. KdF vacations were planned as “an opportunity to make new contacts and to draw comparisons between the new and the old.” Not only was KdF introducing new participants (workers) to tourism, but the KdF tourist was also to be a new kind of tourist with a novel attitude towards his vacation; its trips were organized in a manner that was directed against “holiday individualists.”<sup>85</sup> As Robert Ley claimed, “With [KdF] it is much more fun and much more ‘pleasant’” and that “rather than a gathering of a more or less random mass of ‘individualists,’ there is a happy community, in which social differences are blurred and a true comradeship comes into being.”<sup>86</sup>

The ‘community’ KdF’s travel was after was, however, not reduced to the one a participant of its trips could enjoy with his fellow travelers. Overall, collective practices,

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while minimizing inconvenience and danger [...] KdF’s approach to the beauty of the nation’s natural endowments claimed a specifically German, as opposed to international, version of modernity” (Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, 123ff.) Also, KdF seem to link itself to Rousseau’s call to go “back to nature” as a way to overcome the discontents of civilization: “All the aberrations of life and all obscurity come into being because of the separation from nature, from the natural, which has been caused by our materialistic age. (Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 93.)

<sup>85</sup> KdF claimed: “Unlike the ordinary tourist who puts up in one of the big hotels and is more or less always surrounded by the same sort of people and served with the same type of meals, the Strength through Joy tourist, in his capacity as a son of the people, has greater facility in forming contacts with his landlords as well as with the local inhabitants and therefore hears more and sees more.” (Kahl, *The German Worker Sees the World*.)

Pamphlets and brochures of the Travel Department reveal that such a policy was put into practice in a rather totalitarian manner: a KdF trip was characterized by thorough organization of everything “on behalf” of the participant. The texts call it a “very detailed mentoring by the organization,” and argue that such an approach was necessary due to the inexperience of the traveling workers. (Hübbernet, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft “Kraft durch Freude”: Aufbau und Arbeit*, 47f.) I would suggest that is also very likely that such a close “mentoring” benefited the aims of the National Socialist organizers, as it allowed them a tight control over the practices and consequently impressions and opinions of the participating travelers. In addition to KdF’s own “mentoring,” there was also a control imposed by the regime: travelers were monitored by spies from the Security Police and the Gestapo, who participated “incognito” in the trips and reported back about non-conformist and Nazi-critical behavior or utterances by vacationers. (Cf. BArch R 58/ 943 and R 58/ 944.)

<sup>86</sup> Robert Ley, *Ein Volk erobert die Freude* (Verl. d. Dt. Arbeitsfront, 1937), 23f.

and importantly, communally experienced joy,<sup>87</sup> were considered an important building block towards the establishment and fortification of the “racial community” on a more national level, both socially and geographically. The opening of the arena of travel to working class people was supposed to allow them to share common experiences with members of the other classes in Germany. Through this practice, KdF organizers hoped to unite Germany’s population. This unification-effort also had a geographical element; thus, it was an important educational objective of KdF travel to make the Germans more familiar with their home country.<sup>88</sup> Regional variations should be considered as a rich diversity, not as hindering differences. Accordingly, most KdF trips aimed to introduce German tourists within Germany to the inhabitants and customs of the regions visited.<sup>89</sup> KdF’s travel aimed to overcome any kind of separatism on the local or regional level: tourists were to act as emissaries of their region to others, but simultaneously to recognize their kinship with the inhabitants of the regions they spent their vacation in.<sup>90</sup> KdF cruise ships traveling abroad were another KdF activity with an explicit ‘educational component,’ which was intended to foster feeling of togetherness as well as augmenting Germans’ knowledge about other German regions, their customs and people. Cruise

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<sup>87</sup> Later in this chapter, I will address in more detail KdF’s “joy production” in the arena of travel.

<sup>88</sup> See Hübbenet, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft “Kraft durch Freude”: Aufbau und Arbeit*, 47f.: “The fundament of the KdF travel business is naturally formed by vacation trips within Germany, which shall acquaint each German with the beauties of his home land.”

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, (Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 93.) Here the caption under a picture showing a group of people in relaxed conversation, standing and sitting in a meadow, reads: “With KdF in the Eulengebirge. Jolly hour with the hosts in national costumes.”

<sup>90</sup> See Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, 120. The Travel Department was very active in ensuring that these processes could be realized; as Baranowski points out, it organized “get-togethers with locals during their stay.[...] KdF required local officials as well as proprietors who fed and housed vacationers to host the events, which ranged from displays of local customs and costumes to hikes.” (Baranowski, *Strength*



activities included cultural events displaying the customs of a particular region. The KdF propaganda book *Unter dem Sonnenrad* includes a photograph (see below) showing a group of people in traditional Bavarian costumes performing a traditional Bavarian dance on board the “Wilhelm Gustloff” on its way to Rome.<sup>91</sup> So even foreign trips included encounters with other German regions, their inhabitants and customs. Additionally, international travel supposedly enhanced the travelers’ appreciation of Germany – KdF publications stress that the tourists, although they enjoyed their trips to foreign places, came also to realize how “orderly,” “developed,” or just familiar and “German” Germany really was.<sup>92</sup>



**Unity through Travel:** Fig. 1.6 (left) KdF tourists chatting with their “hosts” on a KdF trip in Silesia (*Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 99;) Fig. 1.7 (right) Dancing in Bavarian traditional costumes on board of the KdF cruise ship “Wilhelm Gustloff” (Ibid., 55.)

The KdF travel program was, in sum, another attempt to form and strengthen the German *Volksgemeinschaft*. The KdF aimed to incorporate the workers into the overall population

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*Through Joy*, 120.)

<sup>91</sup> Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 93.

<sup>92</sup> See Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, 187.



by allowing them privileges that had been limited to the upper-classes before, to unify Germans by giving them the opportunity to have communal experiences with other Germans and to educate them about Germany. The purpose was to overcome prejudices and regional boundaries, and additionally, by teaching the workers about their German culture and the beauty of German landscapes, to make them proud of the German “living space.”<sup>93</sup>

A large part of KdF’s goal of *Volksgemeinschaft*-building was to be achieved through the employment of cultural activities. KdF put this into practice through its different departments and this was based on different, even contradicting concepts of what such culture should be and how it should be realized. For KdF’s *Amt für Volkstum und Heimat* [Department for Folklore and Homeland], there was little ambiguity about the concept of culture. Its “cultural” activities were to be traditional and ‘völkisch.’ This department had the clear rationale to facilitate and support Germans’ engagement in folk activities in order to allow them to rediscover their heritage and reconnect to their traditions. In this manner, they would be turned into agents for a reconstruction of Germany’s folk life; this in turn was assumed to strengthen the *Volksgemeinschaft*. KdF organizers believed that for this, lively participation was essential, only this would lead to the formation of a strong and unified Germany and German *Volk*. Such formation of a community unified in *völkisch* spirit was the department’s ultimate goal. Again, we can

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<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the Nazis claimed that by promoting the Germans’ travel activities, they would realize a deep German need. “Travelling,” they argued, had always been “part of the German soul”: “Germans always felt the urge to travel afar, to see the world, to take pleasure in its unknown beauties and to learn from it. The migration of the Germanic tribes, the Vikings’ forays over the oceans, the Crusades in some sense, the activities of the Hanseatic League, the trail of German peasants from the Rhine and the Mosel downwards along the Danube to the Black Sea, the old mercenary pikeman...all these are examples of a longing for the far away which is deeply rooted in the soul of our people and our race.” (Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 93.)

see how this was tightly in line with and supportive of KdF's overall objective to create an undivided Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft*.

But how was this theoretical outlook translated into practice? It's main task was the advising of other KdF departments in the direction of establishing a "new national folklore"<sup>94</sup> when they were arranging events in the fields of music, theater, folk art, literature, film, festival and vacation. But the departments also independently initiated activities and programs. In the field of music, this included, for example, a campaign entitled "The German worker sings again." Here, the department set up singing weeks in factories [*Werksingwochen*."] These were to encourage industrial workers to sing together before or after their shifts.<sup>95</sup> A similar activity of the department was its "open singing hours" events [*Offene Singstunden*]: these were gatherings of people, outside their workplace, in order to sing folk songs together.<sup>96</sup> Overall, the Department for Folklore and Homeland tried to actively foster the interest in and consequent collective practice of German folklore art, music, and dance. Main vehicle for this were the department's *Volkstumsgruppen*; these folklore groups met on a regular basis to engage in *völkisch* activities, guided by representatives of the Department for Folklore and Homeland. Their practices included folk music performed in choirs, orchestras, or bands

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<sup>94</sup> BA NS 5 I / 365; "'Kraft durch Freude': Kundgebung für Volkstum und Heimat," *Der Angriff*, Feb.12, 1934.

<sup>95</sup> Reputedly, approximately 350 of such singing weeks were organized in factories throughout Germany in the first half of the year 1934, drawing 63,000 participants. (See BArch NS 26/ 276.)

<sup>96</sup> About 100 such singing hours took place from April until August 1934, with 150 Germans participating. For the city of Freiburg the report boasts that one singing evening was attended by 5,000 people. (Ibid.). Another source speaks of up to 2,000 singing evenings a month. (BArch NS 5 I / 365.)

as well as folk dancing and theater.<sup>97</sup>

The activities of the *Amt für Volkstum und Heimat* correspond clearly to the general KdF-principles of “active participation” and “collective experience.” In this framework, the department operated with a rather clear-cut definition of “culture” and “art”; it considered itself responsible for folklore art which corresponded to the contemporary definition of “*völkisch*.” “national with emphasis on the values grounded in race and folklore.”<sup>98</sup> This, however, does not describe KdF’s overall concept of art and culture; in fact, it seems that this attitude was mostly limited to the Department for Folklore and Homeland, and was not very dominant in other areas of KdF.<sup>99</sup> This is important because the *Amt für Volkstum und Heimat*’s notion of “*völkisch*” helps us see what KdF might mean by “German” and “characteristically German joy practices.” But we also see that the definition was not in fact a clearly global notion in KdF’s work.

KdF sometimes focused on notions of Germanness in cultural practices and

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<sup>97</sup> The Saxony *Gau* reported that for the year 1938 there were 1,126 of such groups within its district, of which 985 were connected to a certain company, while the others were independent groups. The report went on to detail the activities of these groups: the majority were active in the field of music, performing folk (350 out of the 1126 groups), forming choirs (303), brass *bands* (147), string orchestras (32) or singing circles (96); other *Volkstumsgruppen* were devoted to folk dancing. (See Barch NS 5 I /209.)

<sup>98</sup> Definition of *völkisch* in the 1940 *Volks-Brockhaus*; quoted after Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 645. In her entry on “*völkisch*,” Schmitz-Berning points out, that Hitler was opposed to the term *völkisch*, since it was not clearly enough defined, making it vulnerable to “harmful attempts” (Hitler, quoted after Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, 646.) At the same time, however, Hitler referred to Nazi ideology as a *völkisch* belief in *Mein Kampf*. (See page. 420f, quoted after Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, 646f.) Such ambiguity about the term and its content seems to be reflected in KdF’s activities; the organization seems to have not been clear whether to fully embrace *völkisch* contents or rather dismiss them/ not focus on them.

<sup>99</sup> An exception might be KdF’s work in the countryside; here all of KdF’s work, i.e. its work through all its different departments was characterized through a *völkisch* “blood-and-soil” orientation. (For a more detailed discussion of this, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.) It is arguable that it was a lack of *völkisch* thought behind KdF’s work that was behind ideologue’s Alfred Rosenberg’s constant criticism towards KdF; on the troubled relationship between Rosenberg and Ley/KdF, cf. Reinhard Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verl. Anst., 1970).

sometimes did not. There was an unresolved tension between “high brow” and “low brow” culture that characterized KdF’s work. KdF never clearly defines what kind of culture and art it really supported, but the organization was consistently emphatic and unambiguous in its propaganda that it wanted to “bring culture to workers.” This claim can be found over and over in KdF’s publications, and pervades many of its activities, at least in how they were ostensibly conceived.

One purpose behind KdF’s “bringing culture to the workers” was the effacing of class boundaries altogether and to integrate the workers into the Nazi envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*. In this manner, “bringing culture” to the workers, and indeed to all Germans, was another element of strengthening both the individual German and the German nation overall: the former’s intellectual scope was to be enriched, while the latter should be made more cohesive. Clearly, the notion of art and culture did some heavy lifting here for KdF, so the notions remaining vague is very interesting.

KdF’s actions in this realm were driven by the assumptions that Germans were estranged from their country’s cultural tradition. KdF organizers were especially concerned about workers in this regard. They considered it one of their main tasks to introduce them to the world of “high brow” culture, which so far had been the exclusive terrain of the elites and members of the upper-classes. Nazi propaganda blamed workers’ estrangement from this realm on a coalition of the bourgeoisie and the Marxists. Positing this rather curious coalition allowed KdF to paint itself as uniquely on the side of the workers: it did not exclude them from these cultural fruits as the bourgeoisie had done, but it did not despise bourgeois joys just because they had been associated with the bourgeoisie. In KdF’s view, Marxists ignored the value of culture, the bourgeoisie

trapped that to itself; only KdF freed it for those for whom it truly mattered. KdF propaganda proclaimed that the bourgeoisie and Marxists had “shut the worker out from the blessings of culture, suppressed his creative potential, stole from him all joy in life and honor in work, denied his intellectual and mental value” and thus established a “gulf between the everyday world of work and the world of the intellectual, the beautiful, the sublime.”<sup>100</sup> KdF set out to change this. By granting workers access to the world of German “high brow culture” and fine arts, it wanted to help create and strengthen the *Volksgemeinschaft*. This can be especially discerned for its branches *Volksbildungswerk* and the *Amt Feierabend*.

The *Deutsches Volksbildungswerk* [Institute for the Education of the German People] was the educational branch of KdF; it worked via agencies installed in cities all over Germany, called “*Volksbildungsstätten*” [“Educational Institutions for the People.”]<sup>101</sup> Ley opened the first *Volksbildungsstätte* in Munich on October 15, 1935; simultaneously, there were inaugurations of institutes in other German cities.<sup>102</sup> In smaller towns, where the opening of such institutions was not feasible due to small populations, the *Volksbildungswerk* operated by organizing one-off or limited series of

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<sup>100</sup> Horst Dreßler-André, *Drei Jahre Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft “Kraft durch Freude”: Ziele und Leistungen* (Berlin, 1936), 4–5. [Published in English.]

<sup>101</sup> A person in charge of organizing events for the Institute of Education was called *Volksbildungswart* [People Education Attendant]; in concordance with Nazi categorizations, there were *Orts-*, *Kreis-*, and *Gauvolksbildungswarte*. In October 1937, Ley ordered that each company with more than 300 employees would have its own *Volksbildungswart*, who would be in charge of both motivating the employers of “his” company to attend the educational events of the institute and organizing those specifically within his company. This directive represented another attempt by Ley to link German companies and its workers closely to KdF; the second section of my dissertation, “KdF at work”, will investigate more closely the practice and success of this policy.

<sup>102</sup> See BArch NS 15/42, pag. 30; “‘Deutsches Volksbildungswerk’: Am 15. Oktober Eröffnung der deutschen Volksbildungsstätten,” *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, Jul. 7, 1936.

events.<sup>103</sup> Fees were kept low to allow everybody to participate.<sup>104</sup> The Institute's activities included lectures, seminars, and workshops (teaching, for example, languages, handicrafts or music), tours, cultural trips, and exhibitions.<sup>105</sup>

One of the *Volksbildungswerk*'s typical activities was informational events introducing workers to "high culture." These were meant to alleviate workers' perceived cultural poverty and to remove KdF-diagnosed "inferiority complexes" amongst workers and intended to then be followed up by visits to cultural performances organized by KdF's Leisure Department.<sup>106</sup> What did 'high culture' mean? A statement of KdF's worker-oriented approach from a 1938 *Volksbildungswerk* program clarifies the concept: "Whether one can partake in Richard Wagner or Goethe or Schiller and in the beauties of the country, is no longer dependent on being poor or rich, but that it is only a question of belonging to our race."<sup>107</sup>

KdF' wanted to erase class boundaries and bring to the workers advantages and opportunities formerly denied them. KdF sought to bring culture to the workers, but, in this case, the workers should be aware and grateful that KdF and the Nazi regime were

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<sup>103</sup> See Willy Heudtlass, *Freizeit, frohe Zeit* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1937), 7.

<sup>104</sup> According to Heudtlass, one lesson cost less than 30 Pfennige approximately, see *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>105</sup> For 1938, the Institute reported 41,842 events conducted in its buildings, the *Volksbildungsstätten*, and 65,743 events outside of them in smaller cities and sometimes villages; normally places with less than 100,000 inhabitants, with 3,705,128 and 2,607,643 participants respectively. Most of these events were part of workshops ("*Arbeitskreise*,") which met on a regular basis to study, practice or build something together (there were overall 11,441 workshops, drawing 110,979 participants), and lectures (16,600 with 1,800,025 participants), followed by guided tours (15,363 tours with 1,328,374 participants) and seminars (3,329 with 13,317 events and 379,105 participants). (See Deutsches Volksbildungswerk, *Arbeitsjahr 1938* (Berlin, 1938), 18. Numbers were also given for cultural trips, educational hikes, visitations, study groups, educational evenings [in smaller cities and villages], and exhibitions.)

<sup>106</sup> See BArch R 43 II/ 557; pag. 5; speech by Ley on KdF from Nov. 27, 1933.

<sup>107</sup> Workers were to understand that it was the Nazis and KdF that "have the power to open up culture for

doing this. Second, KdF aimed to strengthen the Nazi concept of race. The allusion to the racial element inherent in the *Volksgemeinschaft* in the quotation above points to a certain urgency of KdF organizers to reach workers: it was crucial to “release” German workers’ strength. According to Nazi ideology, this ‘inherent strength’ existed in them given the special racial attributes they had as members of a superior, “Aryan” race. Of course, Nazi ideology also assumed that this race was permanently threatened by other inferior races. Thus, Germans – all Germans, including workers – were believed to be involved in a necessary and inevitable fight against this threat. Educating workers, i.e. engaging and “cultivating” their minds, would lead to an increase of their overall “strength,” from which the entire “racial community” would then benefit. In this logic, an “enlightenment” of the workers, “letting him partake in everything high ever generated by our [German] scholarship and our culture” was not only good for its own sake, but also “for the sake of the eternity and power of [the German] nation.” Put briefly, the argument was that one simply could not “afford to let the racial factors, inherent in [the Germans] [...] go to waste.”<sup>108</sup> Strengthening the mind of each German (worker) would boost the strength of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and was a necessary act for Germans to fend off threats to their existence, so the Nazis believed. The *Volksbildungswerk* was a sort of Sports Department for the mind: the Germans’ strength could be released and augmented through training, by encountering more of Germany’s great culture and history.<sup>109</sup>

However, despite this rationale for the institute’s existence, many of the

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them.” (Volksbildungswerk, *Arbeitsjahr 1938*, 50.)

<sup>108</sup> See Ibid., 46.

<sup>109</sup> Of course, a positive second effect would be that through this, Germans would also become more

*Volksbildungswerk's* events, in their execution, were devoid of blatant Nazi ideology. Somewhat astonishingly, this was, purposeful. The Institute was to refrain from openly disclosing any ideological aims behind its practices; *Volksbildungswerk's* educators were asked to make an effort to provide “political persuasion without letting this show in its outer appearance.”<sup>110</sup> Political influence was to be encouraged without being seen: winning over Germans for Nazi political-ideological aims was the final educational purpose of the department's work, but participants should be led there gradually and via non-political issues.

Because we know Nazi ideology was evil, we imagine the Nazis trying to persuade Germans of this “bad” ideology without the population's quite noticing it. Indeed, today we might encounter neo-Nazi texts which display just such wariness and a tendency to employ deceptive “PR” because of their awareness of the general discourse around Nazism and, of course, the fact that direct endorsement and dissemination of Nazi ideology was practically forbidden in Germany today. But this is not the context of a Nazi ideologue during the 1930s. For the author of this text, Nazi ideology was inherently positive, a new and revolutionary thinking. The caution displayed with regard to Nazi *weltanschauung* thus does not stem from any second thoughts about its content.

KdF sought to persuade a possibly recalcitrant group of something ‘good’ without their quite noticing it. KdF-*Volksbildungswerk* organizers wanted to win over workers. Knowing about their potential antagonistic political inclinations and ideologies, however,

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patriotic.

<sup>110</sup> BArch NS 22/ 782; “Rundschreiben Nr. 9/38 der NSDAP, Reichsorganisationsleiter, Hauptschulungsamt vom 14.2.1938,” to *Gauschulungsämter*, subject: *Deutsches Volksbildungswerk*.



the institute was careful about too aggressively promoting their own ideology, so as not to scare the workers off. Instead, it hoped to win them over gradually. The circular quoted above put it as follows: “this is necessary, since the majority of the participants at such events attend[ed] because of some specialist interest and often ha[d] restraints about political-ideological contents or certain [opposed] bonds.”<sup>111</sup> Overall, we can see here a configuration and reasoning valid for all of KdF<sup>112</sup>: while its effects and overall guidelines were clearly attuned to Nazi ideology, the exact content of its activities were not necessarily characterized by such commitment to Nazi ideas and politics.<sup>113</sup>

“Bringing culture to the workers” was central to the operation of the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> It is important to clarify, moreover, that such ‘non-ideological’ orientation was in fact less pronounced with the *Deutsches Volksbildungswerk* than among other KdF departments. (Indeed, this might be the reason that we find a source demanding restraint from direct propagandizing of this Institute; such an appeal was here apparently most needed.) While the Institute had many offerings that had little to do with political and ideological education, such as handicraft courses and foreign language classes – both highly popular – there were also more “loaded” seminars and lectures. A syllabus for a 1938 course at Hanover’s *Volksbildungsstätte* is a good example for this; its title was “Forces of Destruction” (“*Mächte der Zerstörung*”) and it ran over seven evenings. The first class was called “Foreign Spirit against German Disposition” and covered topics such as “The Struggle for Germanic Values of Character” or “Germanic Truth Seekers in their Fight against Obscurantists and Jews.” The second evening dealt with “Destruction of Race or Preservation of Race,” looking at topics such as “Worrying about the Preservation of German Genetic Make-Up” or “The Healthy Family as *Völkisch* Life Cell.” The class then moved on to discuss “The struggle against a German Empire”, the “Abuse of the German Workforce”, “Corrupting the Spirit of the Army” and “The Destruction and Degeneration of our Culture,” to finally address in the last session “The Victory over the Forces of Destruction” as achieved by the Nazis. (Cf. BArch NS 22-736, (“Arbeitsplan der Vollkurse der Volksbildungsstätten der Gau Süd-Hannover,” here “Arbeitsplan from Nov. 10, 1938.”) It is curious to see how the progression of the course moves through history, religion, biology and economics, pretty much covering all sectors of society, and ends with warfare.

<sup>113</sup> It is more than questionable, however, whether such “absence” of Nazi ideology in KdF did indeed allow for a gradual “nazification,” as it is strategized here by the *Volksbildungswerk*. In my following chapters, which deal with the reception and effects of KdF, I will examine this issue more closely, to ultimately suggest that KdF events did in fact not lead to a ‘nazification.’ However, the absence of ideology in the execution of KdF events appears to have still worked in KdF’s (and the Third Reich’s) favor: it was apparently for many this feature that made KdF events attractive, thus fostering participation in them and thereby eventually leading to a stabilization of the regime. This distinction is important to my overall analysis of KdF. KdF can be seen to stabilize, support, and further the aims of the regime *without* nazifying its audience.

*Volksbildungswerk*, and it was equally central to KdF's work through its *Amt Feierabend* [Leisure Time Department].<sup>114</sup> This department was responsible for the organization of cultural events of all kinds; it arranged visits to theater and opera performances, concerts and arts exhibition to affordable prices or directly hired theater and vaudeville ensembles as well as orchestras, musicians or dancers to play, often as part of so-called "social evenings," in various venues, including spaces within industrial factories.<sup>115</sup> Overall, the Leisure Department's goal to "bring culture to the workers" contained the intent to foster the Nazi envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*. In addition to the Leisure Department's goal to help workers to overcome a certain "inferiority complex" which Nazi propaganda had detected amongst them,<sup>116</sup> there was also a goal of enhancing patriotism at play: gaining an appreciation of German culture would make the audience proud of its fatherland.

In line with its overall goal to "bring high culture to the people," a large amount of these were classical concerts – Nazi propaganda claimed that "the best orchestras and the most famous conductors" were playing.<sup>117</sup> One of the orchestras playing for KdF was

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<sup>114</sup> A survey about workers' leisure time activities, conducted in 1933-34 at the Siemens factory in Berlin, had revealed that 80% of its workers rarely or never visited cinemas and theaters. The survey was based on 42,000 answered questionnaires. [Cf. *Siemens-Mitteilungen* 151, Jul. 1934, quoted in Wolfgang Zollitsch, *Arbeiter zwischen Weltwirtschaftskrise und Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte der Jahre 1928 bis 1936*, 88 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 131.]

<sup>115</sup> The amount of events organized by the Leisure Department and the numbers participating rose quickly over the years. According KdF figures from 1938, there were 21,057 events in 1934, with 9,111,663 participants. Within the next year, the number of events had more than tripled (69,135), and participation numbers of 23,745,116 were reported. In 1936, there were 91,323 events with 31,769,702 participants, again rising to 116,994 events in 1937 with 38,435,663 participants. For the first half year of 1938, KdF recorded 24,304,341 people as having participated in leisure time events of the *Amt Feierabend*. [See Anatol von Hübbenet, ed., *5 Jahre "Kraft durch Freude": Leistungsbericht der NS.-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude" zum 27. November 1938* (Berlin: Verl. d. Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1938), 11.]

<sup>116</sup> BArch R 43 II/ 557; pag. 5; speech by Robert Ley on KdF from Nov. 27, 1933.

<sup>117</sup> Hübbenet, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude": Aufbau und Arbeit*, 36.



**Factory Concerts:** Fig. 1.8 KdF-concert with the Vienna Philharmonic orchestra and conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler in a factory work room (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image No. 50071597)

the prestigious Berlin Symphony Orchestra<sup>118</sup> which put together a special concert series for the leisure organization. Subsidized by the DAF, the Nazi party and the *Reich* Culture Chamber, KdF's Leisure Time Department was able to offer discount tickets to the symphony for less than one *Reichsmark*.<sup>119</sup> In 1937, the KdF

reputedly staged 3,760 concerts all over Germany, with 1,903,271 people attending, and many of them also simultaneously broadcast via the radio. By 1938, KdF's Leisure Department had succeeded in reserving contingents of tickets for its organization for selected concerts at every single German concert hall.<sup>120</sup> For smaller cities without their own municipal orchestras, KdF organized performances of touring orchestras, especially through the Nazi *Reichs-Symphonieorchester*.<sup>121</sup> Additionally, KdF organized factory

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Pamela M. Potter, "The Nazi 'Seizure' of the Berlin Philharmonic, or the Decline of a Bourgeois Musical Institution," in *National Socialist Cultural Policy*, ed. Glenn R. Cuomo (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 39-65.

<sup>119</sup> See Misha Aster and Wolf Lepenies, "*Das Reichsorchester*" *die Berliner Philharmoniker und der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Siedler, 2007), 212. According to Aster and Lepenies, "KdF concerts were cheap and easily accessible, but at the same time they were bombastic events with national socialist rituals, fanfares and superlatives – and swastikas everywhere." (Aster and Lepenies, "*Das Reichsorchester*" *die Berliner Philharmoniker und der Nationalsozialismus*, 214.)

<sup>120</sup> See Hübbenet, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude": Aufbau und Arbeit*, 225.

<sup>121</sup> The so-called "orchestra of the *Führer*" had been founded already in 1931 to realize national socialist idea in the field of culture and music. (See Hans-Jörg Koch, *Das Wunschkonzert im NS-Rundfunk* (Cologne; Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 33. See also E. Valentin, "Musik für jedermann! Betrachtungen zum fünfjährigen Bestehen des NS-Reichssinfonieorchesters", in *AMZ* 63 (1936), 769 f.; quoted in Nina Okrassa, *Peter Raabe* (Cologne; Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2004), 270. and Michael Kater, *The Twisted*

concerts, i.e. orchestras performing within the physical space of German factories. This was a direct measure to ensure the fulfillment of the organization's promise to open the sphere of high culture to German workers. The photograph above, for example, depicts such a "*Werkkonzert*" ["factory concert"] and shows the famous conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler during a concert in a Viennese factory in March 1943.<sup>122</sup>

In the fields of fine arts, too, KdF's Leisure Department was concerned to make German workers better acquainted with visual and sculptural high art. To promote this goal it organized exhibitions within German factories. By May 1938, the department had arranged 1,574 factory exhibitions, which over 4 million German workers attended.<sup>123</sup> The photograph below illustrates such an event. On display were either works by the workers themselves, produced with KdF's stimulation and assistance, for example in arts classes run by the *Volksbildungswerk*, or more or less professional art pieces. In this context, professional pieces were not only meant to edify but also to motivate the workers to make art themselves. Thus, factory exhibitions' objectives were not limited to the display of art; they had in addition the educational goal of "establish[ing] the prerequisites for the acquisition of a deeper understanding of art, for example, [by showing] the creation of sculpture from a stone block to a monument or the erection of a building from early sketches until the final plan and the actual execution."<sup>124</sup> The factory

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*Muse : Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33f.

<sup>122</sup> However, it is important to note that such KdF activity in fact was not always enthusiastically received by the workers in the audience; I will discuss this in more detail in both the second and the last chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>123</sup> Hübner, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude": Aufbau und Arbeit*, 36f.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

exhibitions seem to be representative of several recurring features of KdF's activities. Previously exclusionary aspects of culture were made available to workers. But it was not just that this culture was now to be available to the workers – it was in fact brought to them, right into the factories in this case. And then, not only should culture be actively available to workers, but ideally the workers would seize the opportunity to actively participate in and produce culture or art.

The presence of art in factories – where workers would find it hard to ignore – and the expectation that workers should create their own art raises questions about the normativity of 'imposing' art on workers. KdF was always clear that participation in its program was voluntary. However, there was a normative tension between “low brow” and “high brow” art and conceptual diffuseness about the incorporation of ‘properly German’ culture. To grasp a little more of this, we can follow the Leisure Department in another of its field of activity, organizing trips to a museum. The department organized



**Visual Arts in Factories:** Fig. 1.9 Factory exhibition in a Palatine Pumping station (*Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 150.)

its own exhibitions, but also brought people to museums, offering introductory lectures and guided tours in an attempt to bring art closer to people who had not formerly been visitors to museums. Much of the art displayed or promoted by KdF fulfilled, of

course, certain general Nazi aesthetic standards. Nazism was hostile to modern art. Instead, a sort of heroic realism was favored.

KdF thus had certain demands from artists and art; it bemoaned that for too long artists

had been too removed from the taste and wishes of the German people.<sup>125</sup> Thus, overall, KdF's policy on art was very much in line with the general Nazi stance in that field, and the organization helped to promote this aesthetic by bringing "appropriate" art to new audiences.<sup>126</sup> However, KdF of all places also became an organizer for avant-garde modernist art. The painter Hans Weidemann, an officer in Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry, who had originally run a department for cultural affairs within the Labor Front, had friendly connections with a couple of modernist painters, among them Otto Dix and the expressionist Karl Schmidt-Rotluff.<sup>127</sup> Neither of these artists' works corresponded to official Nazi aesthetic norms; in fact, works of both artists were displayed in the infamous 1937 "Degenerate Art" exhibition in Munich. In 1933, Weidemann was transferred to KdF's Leisure Department, where he became the head of the section responsible for fine arts in this department.<sup>128</sup> Here, together with his assistant Otto Andreas Schreiber used this position to organize exhibitions for KdF, mostly in factories, which continued to show works of artists that were officially shunned in Third Reich, such as Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein, Karl Schmidt-Rotluff or Otto Pankok. This, however,

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<sup>125</sup> Hübbenet, for example, bemoans this "isolation of the art world" and furthermore criticizes a "degeneration" of art, which had turned into mere business under harmful Jewish influence. (See *Ibid.*, 33.)

<sup>126</sup> On Nazi politics and assumptions about arts, as guided by the *Reichskulturkammer* under Goebbels, cf. Alan E Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, & Economics in Nazi Germany: The Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>127</sup> Cf. IfZ Munich, F 104.

<sup>128</sup> At this point in time, the Leisure Time Department was still called *Kulturamt* ["Department of Culture"], and part of KdF's "Department for Folklore and Homeland." In February 1936, it was then re-launched as Leisure Time Department. Overall, this department was forced into several metamorphoses and reorganizations within the overall structure of KdF. A main driving force behind these ongoing changes and restructuring was the antagonism between high Nazi functionaries, especially Robert Ley and Alfred Rosenberg and, to a lesser extent, Joseph Goebbels. (On Rosenberg and his conflicts with other leading Nazis, cf. Bollmus, *Amt Rosenberg*.)

was, unsurprisingly, not advertised widely.<sup>129</sup>

Of course, one could dismiss this case as an exception. It does, however, point to the lack of micro-managing on the part of the leisure organization when it came to the execution of events. In this manner, spaces were opened up that allowed for diverging and deviant activities with the framework of KdF programs, for either participants or, as in this case, by the programs' ground-level executioners. I will explore this phenomenon in more detail in chapter two and especially chapter three.

Another crucial sub-category of the Nazi-envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft* that KdF was heavily involved with was the so-called *Betriebsgemeinschaft* [Factory Community.] The establishment and promotion of such a strong "factory community was a prime concern for KdF; it was an imagined community of the workers *and* their bosses, who, according to Robert Ley, the head of KdF, "belonged by fate together."<sup>130</sup> In fact, the implementation of such a strong factory community was believed to be the first and necessary step to realize a *Volksgemeinschaft* surpassing class boundaries. In 1935, Robert Ley claimed that DAF and KdF had been successful in institutionalizing these factory communities in many plants all over Germany.<sup>131</sup>

In the work of KdF's Leisure Time Department, we can see the goal of building a "factory community" most clearly in one its main fields of activity: in the organization of

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<sup>129</sup> See Hildegard Brenner and Ernesto Grassi, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*, 167/168 (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1963), 73 and 86. See also Reinhard Merker, *Die bildenden Künste im Nationalsozialismus: Kulturideologie, Kulturpolitik, Kulturproduktion*, DuMont Taschenbücher 132 (Cologne: DuMont, 1983), 136.

<sup>130</sup> Ley, *Deutschland ist schöner geworden*, 76.

<sup>131</sup> Ley concluded this speech with the assertion that "For this community, the German Labor Front is the drill ground, but the National Socialist community "Strength through Joy" is the drill by which the

the so-called Social Evenings [*Bunte Abende*.] The play bill of such an evening could contain everything and anything, ranging from folk dances, singing, recitals, theatrical skits, and acrobatics, to puppetry, performances by comedians and magicians, vaudeville, or simply speeches of all kinds. Most social evenings took place in either villages<sup>132</sup> or small towns; in bigger cities, they were often organized on the level of factories, then also often called “*Kameradschaftsabende*” [“Comradeship Evenings.”]<sup>133</sup> This name, although not a Nazi term, clearly conveys one of the goals of these events: they were to foster a feeling of community and equality amongst workers within one factory. With these Comradeship Evenings at factories, KdF wanted to initiate a family-like bonding between employees and employers. Briefly put, both were to cheerfully party together.

While the Leisure Time Department’s work was thus clearly characterized by an attempt to build a strong factory community, the largest responsibility for forging this lay arguable with another branch of KdF, the department “*Schönheit der Arbeit*” [“Beauty of Labor”]. This department aimed to transform German factories on all levels and in minute detail in order to achieve an improvement of the labor conditions for the German workers. This was to create a suitable environment for the building and ‘blossoming’ of factory communities.<sup>134</sup>

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community is exercised.” (Ibid., 77.)

<sup>132</sup> Social Evenings in villages, often labeled “*Dorfgemeinschaftsabende*” [“village community evenings”], will be described more detailed later in chapter four, that addresses KdF’s work in rural Germany.

<sup>133</sup> The latter appear to have been mostly for free, while other social evenings charged a small fee. The free ones in factories were often presented as some sort of “gift” to the workers by their employer.

<sup>134</sup> A handbook of Beauty of Labor, for example, describes the department’s main purpose as follows: “It must be reiterated again and again that the department ‘Beauty of Labor’ is less concerned with exterior decorations and adornments, but is rather concerned with the call to comradesly solidarity to the people and with esteem for the productive human, a concern which finds its expression in the dignified design of the



At the core of “Beauty of Labor” activities to promote these factory communities were its annual campaigns that aimed to clean up and to improve German working sites. Each year, “Beauty of Labor” followed a certain theme, ranging from “Clearing the Plants of Junk” (1934), through “Good Light, Good Work” (1936) and “Clean People in Clean Plants” (1937), to “Hot Food in the Plant” (1939).<sup>135</sup> To “beautify” German factories, the KdF’s



**Beautification of Factories:**

Fig. 1.10 (left) Roof garden on top of a German plant (*Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 77); Fig. 1.11 (right) Recreation area in a chocolate factory built by “Beauty of Labor” (Ibid, 65.)

activities ranged from concerns about architecture of plants as far as considering the design of the furniture in the lounges or the flatware in the dining areas of factories.

The department initiated the renovation and erection of workrooms, break areas, cafeterias, bath rooms and holiday homes for worker.<sup>136</sup> Often, however, this was based

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work environment. The most beautiful factory is useless without a committed factory community. The actual aim is not the beautiful factory, but a strong factory community. [Anatol Hübbsenet, *Das Taschenbuch Schönheit der Arbeit* (Berlin: Amt “Schönheit der Arbeit,” 1938), 22.]

<sup>135</sup> See Smelser, *Robert Ley*, 214f.

<sup>136</sup> According to KdF statistics, from 1933 to 1938 over 600 million *Reichsmark* were invested to reconstruct German plants, to “improve or newly construct 20,741 workrooms, 13,122 maintenance areas and parks, 15,595 cafeterias and lounges, 20,455 security complexes and dressing rooms, 2,557 community houses and holiday homes, 2,107 sports facilities” for workers in and around the factories. (Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 76f.)

on voluntary after-work-time efforts by the factory workers and/or was financed mostly by the companies. In whatever way the plans were meant to be achieved, Nazi brochures proudly displayed pictures of workers relaxing in factory-owned swimming pools (or sun-bathing on comfortable loungers on the roofs of their working places during their break, see above.)<sup>137</sup>

Generally, this KdF intervention into factories can be considered a double strategy. First, by improving working conditions, the Nazis wanted to win over the workers and destroy the support for the political left; and second, they aimed for higher productivity from more contented workers. KdF in the factories, the Nazis argued, was an attempt to reverse misguided developments in the sector of work that had been influenced by Marxism. The “distortions” by Marxism were for the Nazis the actual reason for bad conditions for workers, and consequently for low productivity in the factories:

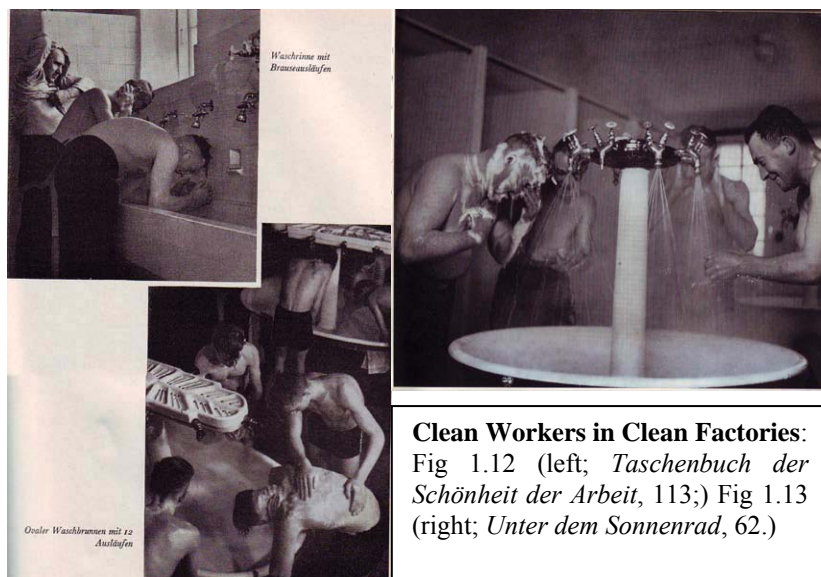
The German is hard-working and ambitious. Enjoying work and accomplishment is one of his essential features. Marxism was successful in taking away his natural enthusiasm for productivity by indoctrinating him with the conviction that he was exploited by the entrepreneur. A human being that thinks of himself as an “object of exploitation” naturally cannot enjoy his work. (Anatol von Hübbenet, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft “Kraft durch Freude”: Aufbau und Arbeit* (Berlin: NS-Gemeinschaft “Kraft durch Freude,” 1939), 23.)

The activities of “Beauty of Labor” reveal KdF’s focused concern for the cleanliness of workers and factories. The leisure organization claimed that the Marxists were responsible for the filthy and derelict states of both – and that its “cleaning up” campaigns would change this situation.<sup>138</sup> It is here we can see how the Nazis’ particular

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. Ibid., 93.

<sup>138</sup> The earlier “unclean” situation of worker and factory was blamed on the Marxist ideology that had caused and maintained such a state, purposefully, according to Nazi propaganda, as “advertisement for the infamous lie of class struggle.” (KdF publication “Sauberkeit und Ehre gehören zusammen,” quoted after



occupation with the *Volkskörper* was put into practice by regulations and interventions in factory life.<sup>139</sup> The clean factory, populated by clean workers, who

could wash themselves in modern, hygienic and clean bathrooms which had been installed by “Beauty of Labor”, recurs as an image in many KdF publications. “Decent” (“*anständig*”), “neat” (“*gepflegt*,”) “orderly” (“*ordentlich*,”) and “clean” (“*sauber*”) are traits these pamphlets frequently attribute to the factories, the work and to the workers themselves. KdF functionaries made sure again and again to emphasize that it was they who had succeeded in cleaning up the factories and the workers, after a period of filth and decay caused by the Bolsheviks.<sup>140</sup>

This concern with cleanliness linked KdF and Nazis to the bourgeois hygiene

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Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, 92.) Some KdF publications used a “before-and-after” scheme to discredit the Marxist and Social democratic movement and boast about Nazi innovations at the same time. (See Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 93.)

<sup>139</sup> Baranowski points out that in fact the Beauty of Labor’s “attention to the bodies of workers became its most distinctive characteristic.” (Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, 87.)

<sup>140</sup> Shelley Baranowski shows that KdF’s discourse about filth changed over time. Early publications had included photographs of dirty workers without denouncing them for such an appearance. Later, such imagery was revised, “photographs of workers came to eschew even the barest acknowledgment of dirt.” According to Baranowski, the now through KdF cleaned bodies of workers “indicated decontamination; the eradication of the plague of class conflict from the social body. Thus a clean and ordered body like a clean and ordered shop floor would incline individual dispositions toward a comradeship that would dissipate the potential for “Marxist” disorder and upheaval.” (Ibid., 97.)

movement in Germany and Europe in the nineteenth century. Social reformers at that time were concerned about the inadequate living conditions of workers. Their interventions focused on educating the lower classes about health and sanitation in an attempt to “rescue” them. Closely connected to the fight against “filth” among the workers was the discourse about their inadequate moral behavior, which was also in need of being “cleaned up.” A similar merging of the discourses about material and ethical “uncleanness” and their removal can be observed in writings and propaganda related to “Beauty of Labor”. According to Anson Rabinbach, the “elimination of that dirtiness, which for Freud was ‘incompatible with civilization,’ took on ritualistic character in “Beauty of Labor.” The ‘low instincts’ and immorality which were said to have been bred in the industrial plants of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could be erased by removing the unhygienic sources of disease and depravity.”<sup>141</sup> The Nazis hoped that by cleaning the factories and the workers within, they would subsequently and indirectly also achieve a cleansing of the workers and their homes. Such an attitude is expressed, for example, by KdF-director Horst Dreßler-Andreß:

The lack of cleanliness and of love of order in the dwellings in the worker’s quarters was the cause of constant great expense for the Public Health Department. .... The dirt in the businesses and factories in which the workers spend their working hours has also frequently a decisive influence on their manner of life outside their businesses, at home and in their families. *If the scene of his labours is well-lit and bright, with rooms that are models of cleanliness and orderliness, the worker will also be clean and bright, and take pleasure in beautifying and looking after his family home.* [italics in original] [Horst Dreßler-Andreß, *Drei Jahre Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft “Kraft durch Freude” : Ziele und Leistungen* (Berlin, 1936.) (Published in English.).]

The cleansing of the German worker was to happen on both the physical and the mental

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<sup>141</sup> Anson G. Rabinbach, “The Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, no. 4 (October 1976): 59.

level, and in all spheres of their lives. Only entirely “clean” Germans were worthy *Volksgenossen*, only they would be useful members of the *Volk* and strengthen the *Volksgemeinschaft* sufficiently. The latter was according to Nazi ideology only open to Aryans, i.e. only racially pure and superior individuals could participate. German workers – if they were not Jewish – fulfilled this requirement. Their “filthiness,” physical, mental, and possibly ideological – Communist – could be cleansed. In this sense, KdF hoped through its program “Beauty of Labor” to both define and consequently to strengthen the Nazi envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>142</sup>

So far, this chapter has explored the practices KdF employed through its different departments in an attempt to help building the Nazi envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft* and to “strengthen the nerve of the people.” However, KdF’s main practice in this regard, which was simultaneously also one of the organization’s main goals, was the “production of joy.” KdF sought to achieve the building and solidification of a strong and unified *Volksgemeinschaft* through a very simple formula: it was its intent to entertain the German population, and in particular the working class. This entertainment in itself – as entertainment and without direct reference to any particular ideological or political content – was sufficient.

The theater played a major role in the Leisure Time Department’s participation in this effort of “joy production.” Overall, this KdF branch succeeded to significantly raise the number of theater goers in Germany after 1933.<sup>143</sup> The high audience numbers were

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<sup>142</sup> The connections of Beauty of Labor’s cleaning to Nazi racial thinking and extermination policies are discussed further in the epilogue of this dissertation.

<sup>143</sup> The numbers reported by different sources do not match: A newspaper article from November 1937

the result of a large amount of advertising and propaganda, but even more so of the pricing policy. KdF arranged contracts with German theaters all over the country, buying tickets en bloc for their productions or even setting up special performances for KdF.<sup>144</sup> The KdF also took over the running of entire theaters or founded new ones themselves. Already in 1934, the *Theater des Volkes* [Theater of the People,]” formerly the *Großes Schauspielhaus* opened in Berlin. It performed theatrical and musical works to “bring art to the people and the people to the art.”<sup>145</sup> In the first months, entrance for all members of the German Labor front was for free.<sup>146</sup> The *Theater des Volkes* opened with a performance of Schiller’s play “*Die Räuber*” (“The Robbers”) with Heinrich George as protagonist “Franz Moor.” *Reichspropagandaminister* Joseph Goebbels, Robert Ley and

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reports 4.6 million KdF theater visitors for 1935, 4.85 million for the following year and 13.5 million for 1937 (BArch R 4903 / 6329, pag. 8; “‘Kraft durch Freude’ als volkswirtschaftliche Leistung,” *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, Dec. 9, 1937.) while a KdF report from July 1939 gives 9 million participants for KdF theater events in 1937, 14 million for 1938 and 8 million theater visitors for the first half of 1939. (BArch R 4902/ 4736; “Stolzer Jahresbericht des praktischen Sozialismus,” *Deutsches Nachrichtenblatt*, Jul. 21, 1939; this report explicitly excludes vaudeville performances and social evenings, which might explain the discrepancy to the afore quoted source.) According to Bogusław Drewniak, who has written on theater in the Third Reich, there were 520,000 theater goers in 1932, increasing under the Nazis to 1.6 million in 1936. Despite the discrepancies, an overall rising trend is confirmed by all the figures. Drewniak states that visiting the theater was transformed into a “national duty” in the Third Reich. [See Bogusław Drewniak, *Das Theater im NS-Staat* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1983), 44.]

<sup>144</sup> Since KdF was subsidized by the German Labor Front, it could resell the tickets more cheaply than their face value, making them available to audiences who had not previously been able to afford theater tickets: – according to Laurence Moyer, KdF-subsidized tickets were on average 35% below the normal price. See Moyer, “The Kraft Durch Freude Movement in Nazi Germany,” 97.

<sup>145</sup> Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad*, 135. see also Yvonne Shafer, “Nazi Berlin and the Grosses Schauspielhaus,” in *Theatre in the Third Reich, the Prewar Years*, ed. Glen W. Gladberry (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 103-119.

<sup>146</sup> Later, tickets cost 50 and then 75 Pfennige, which would be still about half the price of regular tickets. (See Moyer, “The Kraft Durch Freude Movement in Nazi Germany,” 97.)

As KdF writer Anatol von Hübbenet pointed out, early attendances at the Theater of the People were poor, despite the many free tickets and wide-ranging propagandizing for the theatre by KdF and the Labor Front. Hübbenet, writing in 1939, suggested that this proved how many Germans were detached from the theater at the beginning of the Third Reich, and he makes sure to mention that through the positive work of KdF this changed over the years, and that KdF theater events would now typically be sold out. (See Hübbenet,

Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess were present at the premiere.<sup>147</sup> From 1935 on, urged by KdF and DAF, the theater started to move away from performing classic plays towards lighter pieces. From the 1936-37 season on, the *Theater des Volkes* exclusively staged light-hearted operettas.<sup>148</sup> In one of the Leisure Department's main areas of work, the theater,<sup>149</sup> we can thus see a clear commitment to KdF's overall undertaking of "joy production" for the German population.

A particular KdF innovation in the field of theater was the mobile theater; since this "*Reichstheaterzug*" ["Reich theater train"] can be considered as a microcosm for KdF's work in this overall realm, especially in regards to "joy production," the following sections of this chapter will closely analyze the goals and practices of its use. The first KdF mobile theater was designed in 1934 by Daimler-Benz and consisted of a "train" made of two modern omnibuses and a trailer for luggage and props; it was its mission to

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*Die NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude": Aufbau und Arbeit, 34.)*

<sup>147</sup> See Thomas Eicher, Barbara Panse, and Henning Rischbieter, *Theater im "Dritten Reich": Theaterpolitik, Spielplanstruktur, NS-Dramatik* (Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer, 2000), 84. Hitler himself would attend performances at the Theater des Volkes many times during the following years.

<sup>148</sup> See Ibid. Over the years, KdF acquired other theaters, or rented them exclusively, such as Berlin's "Theater am Nollendorfplatz," or Vienna's "Deutsches Volkstheater" and "Raimund Operettentheater." (For the Theater am Nollendorfplatz, see LA Berlin A Pr. Br. Rep. 030 -05 1091. Rischbieter list a few other theatres owned or run by KdF; since this took place during the war, see Eicher/Panse/Rischbieter, *Theater im "Dritten Reich,"* 32. I will deal with those in my chapters on KdF during the war and in occupied areas.)

<sup>149</sup> Theater was also organized by the Department of Folklore and Homeland. Here, as in its work the areas of music, visual arts and literature, the department embraced amateur artistic expression. Its organizers believed that genuine folklore could only come from below, from the people, as an active, creative process. The necessary forces and talents, they argued, were inherent in the German people – they just had to be released. Thus, the departments' organizers considered it their biggest task to promote amateur plays and other dilettante art productions. In the field of theatrical activities, this led to a focus on promoting speaking choirs, folk and factory plays. Speaking choirs were popular amongst KdF organizers because of their practicability, but also because they were considered most "timely," since they "demand[ed] hardness, soldierly closeness and discipline." (BArch NS 5 I / 365.) "Factory plays" were the staging of a play within the physical space of a factory, performed by large groups of workers. According to the first work report of the Folklore and Homeland Department, a play entitled *Aufbruch 1933* [Awakening of 1933] was staged at the Siemens factory in Berlin, performed by a thousand of the factory's employees. (See BArch NS 26/

bring theater performances into all areas of the Baden *Gau*.<sup>150</sup> Over the years, the *Reichstheaterzug* supplied many German districts with “Artistry, Acrobatics, Dance, Songs, Humor,” either for a small fee or, in poorer areas, even for free.<sup>151</sup> KdF’s magazine *Arbeitertum* assigned an “important task” to the mobile theater:

That part of KdF’s work, which is contingent on big venues, on music halls and the theaters of the cities, is brought through to the last village, to the farthest patches of our fatherland. The *Reichstheaterzug* performs in the dance halls of village pubs, in gymnasiums, during the summer in the open-air, and even in factories – and that, by the way, in a manner as colorful and entertaining as the variety shows in metropolises!” [F. Neubauer, “Sensation in der Werkhalle: Der Reichstheaterzug spielt in Betrieben,” *Arbeitertum*, August 1, 1938, 17.]

The photographs accompanying the above-cited article suggest that entertainment and fun were the main focus of the mobile theater’s performances. This amusement-element is also emphasized by worker at the *Volkswagen* factory in Wolfsburg when describing a visit by the *Reichstheaterzug* at his work space. The *Volkswagen* worker refers to the theater train as a “great thing,” stating that it caused him and his comrades “quite an amount of pleasure” [“*etliches Vergnügen.*”]<sup>152</sup>

The *Reichstheaterzug* reveals how KdF was quick to avail itself to the usage of modern means and technology, despite some of its programs’ anti-modernist content.<sup>153</sup> Overall, in fact, KdF and the Leisure Department wanted to be modern. This is clearly

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<sup>150</sup> Daimler Benz also financed a third of its production costs. (See BArch NS 15/47; “Deutsche Arbeiter schaffen den ersten deutschen Theaterzug,” *Der Deutsche*, Jun.10, 1934.)

<sup>151</sup> Cf. BArch, NS 15/ 47; “Der Reichstheaterzug kam: Dt. Krone bereits passiert – Er bringt Freude ins kleinste Dorf,” *Deutsch Kroner Kreis-Zeitung*, Jul. 1, 1935. The article mentions that the performances cost between 30 and 50 cents, depending on location, or no fee in economic poor areas.

<sup>152</sup> BArch 4902/ 1150, pag. 28; “Rund um das Volkswagenwerk,” *National-Zeitung*, Jul. 12, 1938.

<sup>153</sup> See Gottfried Korff, “Feierabend,” in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, ed. Etienne Francois and Hagen Schulze, vol. 3 (Munich: Beck, 2001), 184.



revealed in articles on the touring *Reichstheaterzug*, which proudly report on the audience's interest and fascination with the vehicles and the technological ability to transform a bus into a stage in a very short time.<sup>154</sup> This eagerness to embrace modernity and technology in KdF's organization of leisure time was also revealed by another of its activities. In 1936, the Leisure Department founded the so-called *Reichsautobahn Bühne* [*Reich* motorway theater.] This was a touring company to entertain workers at camps building the new motorways, a prestige project under the surveillance of Fritz Todt, the "Inspector General for the German Road System," and part of the "Four year plan" set in motion in 1936 to help Germany's economy and fight unemployment.<sup>155</sup> The *Reichsautobahn Bühne*'s aim was to bring "culture to the workers" – even if this "culture" consisted of folks plays such as "*Krach um Jolanthe*" ["Quarreling about Jolanthe"] about a farmer and his pig – a popular comedy in the 1930s of the "blood and soil" genre.<sup>156</sup> Clearly the stage was part of KdF's effort of "joy production;" according to

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<sup>154</sup> Cf. BArch, NS 15/ 47; "Der Reichstheaterzug kam: Dt. Krone bereits passiert – Er bringt Freude ins kleinste Dorf," *Deutsch Kroner Kreis-Zeitung*, Jul. 1, 1935.

<sup>155</sup> See Norbert Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany: The Führer State 1933-1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 73. For the Nazi Reichsautobahn project, see Erhard Schütz and Eckhard Gruber, *Mythos Reichsautobahn. Bau und Inszenierung der "Straßen des Führers" 1933-1941* (Links, 1996), especially page 78. A detailed description and analysis of Heinrich von Kleist's *The Broken Jug*, performed by the Reichsautobahn Bühne is provided in Martin Maurach, "'Der zerbrochene Krug' auf der Autobahn: Die Reichsautobahn Bühne 1936/37 zwischen Hochkultur und 'Volksgemeinschaft', Traditionalismus und Modernität," in *Im Pausenraum des Dritten Reiches: Zur Populärkultur im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. Carsten Wuermann and Ansgar Warner (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2008), 61-86.

<sup>156</sup> See Geerte Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg: Deutsches und Alliiertes Fronttheater* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992), 71. Newspaper articles celebrated the success of the *Reichsautobahn Bühne*; its "great and deep reception" in the *Autobahn* labor camps would "demonstrate again and again [...] the German worker's will for culture [*Kulturwillen*]." (Article from *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, Oct. 1936; quoted in *ibid.*) A 1937 newspaper article claimed the initiative to bring theater performances to the Labor camps along the newly-built highways as part of the "*Sonderaktion für die Reichsautobahn*" originated with Adolf Hitler himself. (BArch NS 15/47.) It should also be noted that "*Krach um Jolanthe*" was one of Hitler's favorite plays; reputedly, he visited several performances of this play. [See Volker Kühn, "Der Kompaß pendelt sich ein: Unterhaltung und Kabarett im 'Dritten Reich'," in *Hitlers Künstler: Die Kultur im Dienste des*

1937 newspaper article the stage was part “of a mission” to provide a kind of “entertainment which was new in terms of cultural politics and trend-setting in regards to national socialist entertainment.”<sup>157</sup> While this statement referred to only one (travelling) theater ensemble active on behalf of KdF, it could also be taken to refer to the overall program of the organization and its Leisure Department.<sup>158</sup> And it suggests that even the “silliest” KdF entertainment was to have the correct sort of character.

Its “intrusive” and extensive goal of reaching into the last corner of the Third Reich means the *Reichstheaterzug* also has to be considered a prime example of KdF’s attempt at totalitarian leisure time control. It also must be regarded as a tool of the organization’s effort to homogenize the population beyond social and regional boundaries towards a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*, by making theater, vaudeville, and music accessible all over Germany. The *Reichstheaterzug*’s focus was on entertainment and pure amusement. Politics seems to have been largely absent from the mobile theater’s performances – even though the undertaking itself was political.<sup>159</sup> With all this, the

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*Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 2004), 356.]

<sup>157</sup> BArch NS 15/47.

<sup>158</sup> Written in 1937, the statement can be read as a prediction of what was to come. As Martin Maurach points out, *Amt Feierabend*’s employment of the *Reichsautobahn Bühne* must be considered “a sort of preliminary rehearsal” for later leisure time policies for German workers building the *Westwall* [Siegfried-Line] and then for troop entertainment during the Second World War. (See Maurach, “‘Der zerbrochene Krug’ auf der Autobahn: Die Reichsautobahn Bühne 1936/37 zwischen Hochkultur und ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, Traditionalismus und Modernität,” 61.) The *Reichstheaterzug* was also employed to entertain soldiers after the beginning of the war. KdF’s work during the Second World War will be discussed later in the fifth chapter of this dissertation. It is important to point, however, out that not only the infrastructure for this work had already been already set up in the peace years, but its agenda, too. KdF naturally linked peace and war time and always thought of them together.

<sup>159</sup> It was important for KdF organizers to emphasize this absence, most likely, because they were eager to attract as many people as possible and wanted to avoid scaring them away with politics. Accordingly, the director of the mobile theater, a Mr. Geller, a Nazi party member, responded to the question of what his stage offers with: “Joy! And nothing else. To suspect some kind of political secondary aim is absurd.”

mobile theater was a clear microcosm of KdF's practices and goals.

"Joy production" was also a major element of the KdF's "Social Evenings," or sometimes "Social Afternoons," which the Leisure Department arranged on a large scale throughout the country. Here is a detailed description of a KdF Social Evening. This announcement refers to such an event Weinheim, Palatinate, in 1936, and it illustrates its – intended – "cheerful character":

All of Weinheim has been waiting for the first Social Evening of the winter season 1936-37 for a long time. Now it is finally here. On Saturday, December 5, a Social Evening will take place in the hall of the "*Pfälzer Hof*;" it is going to be a cheerful evening during which the famous "Palatine Humor" will have its say once again. The program features two theatrical scenes – "Whoever goes travelling" and "On the sport field" – cheerful dances, a Viennese waltz, dances from all over the world, historic dances, funny songs, songs from "The Gypsy Baron" and "The Count of Luxembourg", and on top of all this a comedy and humorous dialect speeches. [...] we already know, that on December 5<sup>th</sup> a major attack on our funny bones will be launched, an attack such as this has not been experienced for a long time. [BArch NS 5 I / 231; "Bunter Abend der NS-Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude', " November 27, 1936.]

As we can see from this announcement, Nazi ideology or any kind of explicit political education was not in the foreground of KdF's social evenings; rather, there was a focus on "cheerfulness." Not everybody was terribly happy with KdF's strong emphasis on "joy" and "fun;" many voices criticized KdF events, especially its social evenings with its comedy and vaudeville elements. Critics picked on performances, for their lack of depth, ideological content and low artistic standards. These criticisms, however, suggest by opposition the power of KdF's focus on joy as it conceived it. Thus we see, for example, that despite increasing criticism about the "low standard" of its leisure events, KdF and

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(BArch, NS 15/ 47; "Der Reichstheaterzug kam: Dt. Krone bereits passiert – Er bringt Freude ins kleinste Dorf," *Deutsch Kroner Kreis-Zeitung*, Jul. 1, 1935.)

especially its Leisure Time Department adhered to its emphasis on simple amusement.<sup>160</sup>

What is more, it appears as if this stance would have been backed up by the *Führer* himself, at least in regard to theater. In a private conversation in 1938, Adolf Hitler said that theater performances “ought to be ‘illusions’ for the masses. The man in the street knows the serious sides of life well enough. Since life is serious, joy must be beautiful.”<sup>161</sup> In his 1937 Nuremberg Rally speech, Hitler sought to reconcile the regime’s urge to bring culture via KdF with that to purely entertain:

It is the biggest task of the new Third Reich to carefully look after the cultural works of the past and to attempt to communicate them to the masses of our *Volk*. And this with a degree of understanding, generously and responsibly. It is very clear that someone, who is plagued by the work of the day or many sorrows, will not always be able to take in difficult artistic problems at night and to go to bed with them. He who has to struggle with sorrows needs smiling much more than the one at whom life smiles. That is why theater is not to be a serious matter only, but also is to be about amusement. [*“soll das Theater nicht nur der ernsten, sondern auch der heiteren Muse dienen.”*] [...] It remains most important, that we make an effort to lead our *Volk* this way, via joy and beauty, if possible, to the sublime. [Quoted in Heinrich v. Rekowski, *Rhein-Main: 4 Jahre “Kraft Durch Freude”* (Frankfurt a.M.: Gaudienststelle KdF, Gau Hessen-Nassau, 1938), 93.]

Hitler seems to have assumed that “joy production” was to function as a sort of springboard for KdF’s objective to bring ‘high brow’ culture to workers, or rather, to awaken their interest in this sphere. This conjecture of a gradual working of KdF programs is similar to the KdF organizers’ assumption discussed above that KdF’s work would eventually lead to “nazification” of participants, even though politics was mostly left out. At least in theory, KdF’s focus on entertainment then – instead of one on ‘high

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<sup>160</sup> On this topic, see also chapter five on KdF troop entertainment and Goebbels’ criticism of the leisure organization’s activities.

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Drewniak, *Das Theater im NS-Staat*, 44. In fact, Hitler seems to argue here not distract people from the seriousness of life, but rather suggest accompanying that seriousness with joy or beauty. The difficulty of life is not deceitfully concealed, but rather part of a larger truth also including joy.

culture’ – did not mean giving up on the “bringing culture” to the people, but was rather seen as intractably linked first step.<sup>162</sup>

Joy production lay at the heart of all of KdF’s activities, not only arenas of theater and the Leisure Time Department’s work. It is very visible in the work of the KdF Sports Department.”<sup>163</sup> The words “*Freude*,” “*fröhlich*,” and “*froh*” (happy, cheerful) appear numerous times in KdF Sports brochures. “Men and women happily at play – this is typical KdF-operation” reads a caption under one of the photographs in a KdF sports brochure from 1936. Another one exclaims: “Men and women in a happy community, young and old engaged in a cheerful game.”<sup>164</sup> In the same brochure, Robert Ley describes in a foreword the Sports Department’s task to transform “the after-time of the German worker through happy physical exercises into a source of happiness and healthy life force [...]”<sup>165</sup> Accordingly, in KdF sports “classes, special emphasis is put on joy-accented [*freudebetonten*], funny, and playful exercise courses.”<sup>166</sup> The Sports Department’s activities were meant to entertain Germans as much as to help their fitness, and KdF propaganda emphasized the “fun” part very much in order to win as many participants as possible. Accordingly, the leisure organization’s sports classes had such as “Happy Gymnastics and Games” (“*Fröhliche Gymnastik und Spiele*”).<sup>167</sup> Often, sports

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<sup>162</sup> However, it is important to mention that in both cases – culture and ideology- , things did not develop in this way, as the following chapters of this dissertation will reveal.

<sup>163</sup> See Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches*, 260.

<sup>164</sup> See Reichsportamt der NS.-Gemeinschaft KdF, *KdF-Sport im Bild*, 1.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Kratsch, “Auch ein Beitrag zur sozialen Frage”, 1.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, *Dienstanweisung des Sportamtes der NSG “Kraft durch Freude”* (Berlin: Verl. der

classes were accompanied by music, since, as a KdF brochure points out, “With music, everything is going to be even more beautiful.”<sup>168</sup> As sports historian Hajo Bernett argues, the style of KdF classes was purposefully informal, consciously setting a tone opposite of that of established sport clubs’ classes. Overall, he detects a “mood of light-heartedness and cheerfulness. A rediscovery of playing seems to occur.”<sup>169</sup> The sample of pictures from several KdF publications shown below demonstrates quite clearly the leisure organization’s focus on light, amusing entertainment within the arena of sports.

A dedication to the goal “joy production” is also revealed through an analysis of the *Volksbildungswerk*’s work and marketing. Its publications emphasize that fun, rather than improvement, guided the Institute’s workshops, in which participants spent their free time painting, drawing, playing music or doing handicrafts: “Every achievement, even a

**Joyful KdF Sports:** Fig 1.14 (left) KdF Sports with Music (*KdF-Sport*, 4; ) Fig. 1.15 (center) Happy Gymnastics for Men and Women (*KdF-Sport im Bild*, 4; ) Fig. 1.16 (right) Games and Fun with KdF at Berlin’s Wannsee (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image Nr. 00005480.)




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DAF, 1937), 9.

<sup>168</sup> See Reichsportamt der NS.-Gemeinschaft KdF, *KdF-Sport im Bild*, 1.

<sup>169</sup> Bernett, “Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport bei ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” 106.

very small one, brings joy, which shall be the companion of our everyday life.<sup>170</sup>

KdF's travel department, too, was characterized by an emphasis on "joy production." During their trips, participants were to be constantly entertained through games, music and dance. Amused and happy tourists are what KdF wanted to achieve. The photographs reproduced below from several KdF cruise trips illustrate this stress on entertainment – it was of course also very important to KdF to constantly publish "evidence" of their "fun-filled" activities.

KdF's Sports Department, Travel Branch, *Volksbildungswerk* and Leisure Time Department were driven by an eagerness to "produce joy." To complete the picture, it is important to also briefly address the efforts of KdF's "Beauty of Labor" Program and the Department of Folklore and Homeland. For the former, KdF's overall concern for "joy production" is quite clearly visible: its attempts to beautify German factories aimed at the improvement of workers' outlook on their work and life. Ultimately, this was meant to make them happier. Here, we see the direct connection between happiness and strength; KdF organizers believed it to be a causal, as expressed through its name, "Kraft durch Freude." KdF's "Beauty of Labor" was established following the assumption that a latent

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<sup>170</sup> Willy Heudtlass, *Freizeitschaften im Deutschen Volksbildungswerk* (Berlin: Verl. der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1939), foreword. But this individual joy is immanently linked to the joy and strength of the entire *Volk*. A *Volksbildungswerk*-brochure positioned the institute's work at the intersection of "joy production" and the strengthening of the *Volksgemeinschaft*: "Knowing about the beauty, power and greatness of one's own people and country elevates one above everyday life. The awareness of increased performance and abilities to perform leads to true joy. That is how the education of adults in of the *Volksbildungswerk* with its multifarious ways serves the strengthening and deepening of a vivid *Volksgemeinschaft*." (Alexander Sangiorgio, *Ein Querschnitt durch den Arbeitsplan und die Arbeitsweisen einer Volksbildungsstätte des Amtes Deutsches Volksbildungswerk* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1941).



**Fun with KdF Travel:** Fig. 1.17 (left) Tug-of-War on board during KdF's Madeira trip (*Arbeitertum*, Sonderheft Madeirafahrt 1936, 11;) Fig. 1.18 (center) Sack race on KdF ship (*Arbeitertum*, December 1, 1941, 10;) Fig. 1.19 Fun with Sports on Deck (*Arbeitertum*, Sonderheft Madeirafahrt 1936, backside.)

German strength lay not yet fully used – particularly among the working class. Making these workers more joyful and consequently strong, and this through direct intervention in their work places, was the explicit tactic of the Nazi policy to create a *Volksgemeinschaft*. During an international conference on leisure in 1938, the German representative boasted of the reputed effects KdF had had so far:

We have awakened unimagined energies which were slumbering in the working people. We give to the workers all the beautiful, sublime, and worthy things which make human life worth living. Life will always be a struggle; it is only a question of how to be the master in this struggle. This is a world of conflicting forces and recurrent difficulties. A person who is happy can accomplish with ease things that will defeat a depressed person. [Günther Adam, "Practical Activities of the National-Socialist Fellowship 'Kraft Durch Freude'," in *World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation, German Addresses for Committee[s] I-XI* (Rome, 1938), 19.]

KdF's *Amt für Volkstum und Heimat*, too, was ultimately driven by an urge to provide happiness for Germans. An initial examination of the department's core activities of the throughout the 1930s suggests that the light-heartedness and cheerfulness of other KdF department's work and activities were absent from this department. However, it would be wrong to read this absence as evidence that this department did not participate in KdF's



overall vision to make Germans happy. Rather, the Department for Folklore and Homeland, with its concern for Germany's past, tradition and heritage, had the task to ground this happiness in a larger historical context. The work of this department was characterized by a positive, productive undertone: under the department's assistance, Germans would engage actively in the production of their people's culture. Only this, KdF publicists argued, would allow, at last, for the real *Volksverdingung* [becoming of a people] of the German *Volk* – the basis of all happiness for Germans according to National Socialist thought.<sup>171</sup>

An examination of KdF's goals according to its propaganda and public and internal writings shows its various activities through its several departments sought to build a harmonized community, especially by including the German working class,. The goal envisioned actively, communally experienced joy. What "KdF envisioned," however, was not quite what unfolded – even though this did not mean that the leisure organization did not end up giving "strength through joy." to Germans and ultimately the Third Reich.

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<sup>171</sup> This chapter's analysis of KdF's joy production has taken less space than my preceding examination of KdF's practices towards "community building." However, this brevity should not be read as an attribution of lesser importance. Rather, it is due to the fact that this chapter only functions to introduce this theme: all following chapters will be concerned with showing the importance and extent of this "joy production"-feature of KdF's work – may it be on the shop floor (chapter two), in the arena of workers' sports (chapter three), in the German countryside (chapter four) or during World War II (chapter five and six). Examining this, the next chapters will complement what has been said here about KdF's goals and assumptions behind its work with an analysis of its effects and reception.

## PART II

### “KdF at Work”

## CHAPTER TWO: “Nazi Fun Factories?” Implementation and Reception of KdF’s “Cultural” Activities for Workers

Commentators of the Sopade, the exiled German Social Democratic Party were worried. Even though they suspected official participation numbers for KdF to be inflated, they could see from their own close monitoring of its activities that by 1935, KdF’s “radius of activity” had grown dramatically. With increasing concern, Sopade chronicled KdF’s numerous enterprises to entertain German workers, aiming at raising their general status in German society (of course, without raising their wages), and how the organization tried to achieve an eventual “atomization [...], occupation and surveillance of the people,” so that “no room [would be] left for individual relaxation, exercise and cultural activity, no room for individual associations and the self-dependent initiative which could grow out of it.”<sup>172</sup>

Not unlike Sopade’s investigations, this chapter will look at KdF’s programs and events for German workers. In particular, I will analyze in detail KdF “cultural” leisure activities, many of which took place in German factories. In addition to scrutinizing their practical realization, this chapter will also explore how these events were received. In one regard, this chapter could be seen as a ‘test’ of the KdF propaganda about its own work – especially its offerings for German workers – which was discussed in the previous

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<sup>172</sup> Klaus Behnken, ed., *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (Sopade) 1934–1940*. Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Petra Nettelbeck, 1980), 1455 [= Dec. 1935; in the following: *Sopade*.] On the notion of “atomization of everyday life” in Nazi Germany, see also Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), esp. 236ff.

chapter. While this first chapter was about what KdF aspired to be and to achieve, this chapter attempts to rather look at some of ‘the realities’ of *Kraft durch Freude*. In other words, this chapter seeks to assess the effect and ‘successes of KdF activities for workers. It does so by utilizing a two-tier analysis. The first part of this is a “ground-level perspective” and explores KdF’s leisure activities for the workers on the shop floor at several exemplary companies.<sup>173</sup> The second part of the chapter then consists of an analysis of a wide array of reports about the leisure organization's work. These come both from the Nazi regime itself, from oppositional groups such as the Sopade,<sup>174</sup> and from testimonies by individual contemporary witnesses who reflect on their experiences with KdF’s cultural activities and its work in factories.

How successful was KdF – especially regarding its plans for the German working class? One of the basic underlying issues of this chapter (and of the dissertation overall) is whether KdF’s activities reached its desired audiences, and if so, what effects this might have had. One result we might expect to find – and presumably the one hoped for by the Nazis – was that KdF events helped “win over” its audiences to the Nazi state and its ideology. This query can be broken down into two analytic questions: were KdF events in fact designed and executed in line with such a goal? And if so, how much of this worldview did the audience in fact absorb? However, it is of course also important to consider the effects of KdF events even if there was not such a “nazification” component,

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<sup>173</sup> This is inspired by works coming from the field of *Alltagsgeschichte*, (co-) founded by historian Alf Lüdtke in. (See, for example, Alf Lüdtke, *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt; New York: Campus, 1989). Martin Broszat was another important pioneer in this field, especially through its “Bavaria project.” (See Martin Broszat, *Bayern in der NS-Zeit: Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevölkerung im Spiegel vertraulicher Berichte* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1977). Other important works for the *Alltagsgeschichte* of the Third Reich are, for example, the aforementioned Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*. Also: Detlev Peukert, Jürgen Reulecke, and Adelheid Castell Rüdtenhausen, *Die Reihen fast geschlossen: Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alltags unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1981).

<sup>174</sup> In addition to Sopade reports, I will look at reports from the socialist group *Neu Beginnen*. The reports from the

including the possibility that KdF restraining from deliberate or explicit nazification projects might have helped stabilize the regime.

Sopade itself seemed to have been ultimately unsure about the effects KdF had on workers and their attitude towards the Nazi regime; its publications note that the news it received about this made for a mixed picture.<sup>175</sup> The above-mentioned report from 1935 is a good example. While it noted higher numbers of workers “captured” by KdF, it also emphasized that many of those workers “were not aware” of the organization’s political goals; they would rather, opportunistically, “take along the profits” they could gain from these leisure activities. The report concluded as follows:

KdF distracts, helps with setting up smoke-screen for the brains, functions propagandistically for the regime. How sustainable these effects are, to what extent the distraction from the rough facts of the cutback of wages and the social sector will succeed, for how long the dictatorship-recipe of “Bread and Circus” [including “Strength through Joy”] will be effective is an open question. [Sopade, Dec. 1935, 1456.]

The question raised here by the Sopade about the effectiveness of Nazi social policy in general and that of KdF in particular, has been debated for decades in historical research.<sup>176</sup> My own study does not presume to deliver a conclusive answer. However,

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regime originate from the Gestapo, SD (SS’s secret service) and the DAF.

<sup>175</sup> Of course, it is important to remind oneself about agendas Sopade had that might have influenced their reporting. Their oppositional stance towards the Nazi state probably heightened their critical attitude towards KdF and the negative effects this might have. Sopade reports wanted to mobilize, in that way it was important that they clearly expressed the danger they saw in KdF, so that they could motivate its collaborators to indeed fight against it/ not take it too lightly. At the same time, there might have also been an interest to minimize KdF’s success – in order not to sound too demoralizing, when for example stating that many workers did indeed – happily- sign up to KdF.

<sup>176</sup> An important contributor and “provocateur” in this debate was of course Tim Mason; see Timothy Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft: Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik 1936-1939* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975); Timothy W Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978); Timothy Mason, “Die Bändigung der Arbeiterklasse im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland: Eine Einleitung,” in *Angst, Belohnung, Zucht und Ordnung: Herrschaftsmechanismen im Nationalsozialismus*, by Carola Sachse et al. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 11–53. Of course, one also needs to mention David Schoenbaum’s work when it comes to the general questions of this debate; see David Schoenbaum, *Hitler’s social revolution: class and status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966). Ulrich Herbert useful “took stock” of the debate in 1989: Ulrich Herbert, “Arbeiterschaft im ‘Dritten Reich’. Zwischenbilanz und offene Fragen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 320–360. Some later works on the role and behavior of German workers, especially in the light of Nazi social politics are, for example, Wolfgang Zollitsch, *Arbeiter zwischen*

my chapter's analysis, especially that of KdF's reception, suggests that KdF did help to stabilize the regime. KdF did so by making the regime more popular for many, or at least by alleviating the discontent of many with it and their opposition to it. KdF could achieve this, I argue, especially through its strong focus on "joy production," and by largely omitting political content. Entertaining Germans thus seems to have helped to "win them over;" this chapter and the following one will demonstrate how this occurred for members of the German working class.<sup>177</sup>

Before delving more deeply into the analysis of the reception of KdF's events in factories on a national level, as it emerges from reports and testimonies, let's look more closely at the practice of KdF in German factories. Three companies, Krupp, Osram and Borsig, provide a sense of the range of the activities. The choice of these three factories stems from the wish to obtain 'comprehensive' insight into KdF's work in Germany's urban industrial plants by encompassing companies from more traditional industrial fields, such as heavy industry (Krupp and Borsig), and more modern areas of production, such as the high-tech industry (Osram).<sup>178</sup> The following investigation will not only uncover

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*Weltwirtschaftskrise und Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte der Jahre 1928 bis 1936*, 88 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); Matthias Frese et al., *Betriebspolitik im "Dritten Reich": Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Unternehmer und Staatsbürokratie in der westdeutschen Großindustrie 1933 - 1939*, 2 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991); Günter Morsch, *Arbeit und Brot. Studien zu Lage, Stimmung, Einstellung und Verhalten der deutschen Arbeiterschaft 1933 - 1936/37*, 546 (Frankfurt am Main ;Berlin ;Bern ;New York ;Paris ;Wien: Lang, 1993); Ludwig Eiber, *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Hansestadt Hamburg in den Jahren 1929 bis 1939: Werftarbeiter, Hafenarbeiter und Seeleute: Konformität, Opposition und Widerstand* (Frankfurt am Main [u.a.]: Lang, 2000).

<sup>177</sup> To an extent, my study will confirm Sopade's argument about KdF serving as a distraction, later repeated by Tim Mason (see previous footnote). However, I believe that it is misleading to think of this distractive effect as an intentionally manipulative "smoke screen," as in the Sopade report cited above. Conversely, I argue that KdF work of distraction was – from the worker's perspective – more active and "participatory" manner, opening up spaces for (seemingly) autonomous, non-indoctrinating leisure activities.

<sup>178</sup> More information on these companies follows below. In order to get in view a second 'more modern' company, I have also conducted archival research in the corporative archives of the pharmaceutical Schering in Berlin. However, the material on KdF at Schering as it could be identified in the company's archive in Berlin was sparse, and led to the assumption that there was no specific KdF branch at Schering. Thus, my findings (or the lack thereof) did not warrant a more detailed discussion of the "case" Schering.

KdF's practices in these three companies. It will also show that the importance of the interplay between companies' managements, its workers, and the leisure organization. Companies' managements were reluctant to let KdF enter the sphere of leisure for factory workers, which they conceived as meddling in inter-company affairs. The study of the implementation of cultural activities through KdF at Osram, Borsig, and Krupp reveals that KdF in German factories was unwanted, but eventually accepted. Often, the companies' managements simply saw no option but to accept KdF's entry onto their shop floors, even if only on a more formal level. However, and rather curiously, while it seemed impossible to refuse KdF or, rather, its leisure events entry into these companies, it appears to have been rather possible to "underexpose" KdF's part there, that is to keep the organization at bay when it came to the direct execution of these events – as long as the socio-political and leisure measures undertaken accorded with very general Nazi demands for producing strength, happiness and community.<sup>179</sup>

As we will see in the following, this manner of "distanced entry" meant that KdF's interventions in the companies occurred in a rather apolitical manner. This is especially striking because these KdF's interventions were certainly imposed in the first place in a non-optional way. However, KdF's focus was on entertaining and bringing relaxation to workers; it was less concerned with disseminating Nazi political content, i.e. with trying to openly re-educate German workers into Nazis. A merely formal presence in the factories thus was in accordance with what it wanted to achieve, while simultaneously realizing a useful conciliation of managements by leaving them the

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<sup>179</sup> It is of course important to bear in mind that the originator for this whole discourse on leisure within the Third Reich was *Kraft durch Freude*. This means that despite attempts, on the part of the companies, to downplay its role, KdF was certainly omnipresent discursively in German factories' spheres of leisure.

desired room to maneuver.

I begin by looking at the Osram Company in Berlin.<sup>180</sup> Leisure events arranged by KdF specifically for Osram workers – and often in Osram buildings – began in March 1934.<sup>181</sup> An office for KdF at Osram was then set up in September of the same year. This might have been the Osram management's reaction to KdF increasingly causing work disruptiveness by pulling away employees from their work to organize KdF's activities.<sup>182</sup> It is telling that Osram ended up embracing this option rather than the opposite approach, which would have been to limit KdF activities at Osram. However disruptive or expensive KdF became, it seems that there was no choice for Osram's management but to 'play along' and support it.

Over the next few years KdF organized all kinds of activities for Osram workers.<sup>183</sup> In addition to a large array of cultural events and social evenings in venues

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<sup>180</sup> The Osram company, a lighting manufacturer, was founded in 1919 (after the patent of an "Osram" lamp had been registered in 1906), and was joined by the AEG and Siemens companies in an attempt to combine their production of electric lamps. The headquarters of the company were in Berlin; by the 1930s, it was one of the world's leading producers of lamps. Today, Osram is still part of the Siemens engineering conglomerate.

<sup>181</sup> See LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 Nr. 660; the first recorded activity was a KdF event which included the screening of sound films on March 3, 1934. (All following information about KdF at Osram, if not otherwise cited, is taken from this above list file.)

<sup>182</sup> This issue had been discussed in May 1934 by Osram's Mutual Trust council of all Osram factories in Berlin. [The Mutual Trust council (*Vertrauensrat*) was the newly installed worker's council, in accordance with the January 1934 "Law on the Organization of National Labor," which played a crucial role in the Nazi synchronization of German industrial life and labor relations. By this law, the companies were to form a *Betriebsgemeinschaft* (company community), consisting of both employer and employees. In principle, the *Vertrauensrat* replaced earlier, often trade-union associated workers' councils, but the new body had only advisory power; see Peter Mathias and Sidney Pollard, *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe: The Industrial Economies: the Development of Economic and Social Policies* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).] In the meeting of Osram's *Vertrauensrat*, there was a complaint that block attendants' workloads had grown too much because of their constant employment by KdF. These tasks would occupy them so completely that they had almost no time left to do any actual company work. Osram initially reacted to this situation by enlarging the numbers of block attendants. (See LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 Nr. 656; "Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Vertrauensrates der Berliner Betriebe der OK am 23. 5. 1934", 7.) The subsequent installment, in September 1937, of a full-time KdF representative (paid by Osram), might have been the long-term reaction to this issue – together with the above-mentioned setting-up of a KdF office.

<sup>183</sup> Already, in 1934, KdF arranged lectures (on October 12, a Professor Ohquist spoke on "How Finland defeated Communism"), established a company hiking group (first hike on November 4) and procured tickets to all kinds theatrical and musical performances (for example, a Folk Theater play at Berlin's *Theater am Nollendorfplatz* on October 17; a Johan-Strauss-concert announced on November 11, or an operetta performance on November 8.



all over Berlin, KdF also started to stage these events directly on Osram's shop floor. One such event, in June 1935, was a classical concert, performed by an army orchestra, during the worker's lunch break.<sup>184</sup> Performed in one of Osram's assembly hall, the concert was broadcast into all other dining halls of Osram's main factory and the factory hall D. An advertisement for the event celebrated it as one where soldiers and workers would come together. While not explicitly mentioned, the Nazi discourse of a harmonious German *Volksgemeinschaft* was clearly present in the announcement: "The soldiers are coming to the workers, and the workers are going to the soldiers! Both – workers and soldiers – fight shoulder to shoulder for the new *Reich!*"<sup>185</sup>

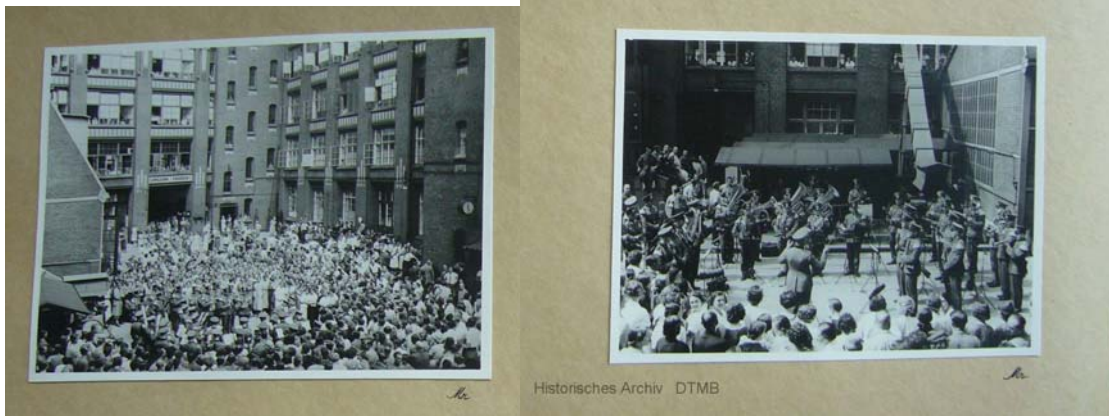
The 1935 concert at Osram was not the only performance of a military orchestra on the company's grounds. A photo album with pictures of social events at Osram contains two photographs of a concert by a *Wehrmacht* orchestra in August 1938 (see below). This concert also took place during the workers' lunch break – a clock on one of the building walls shows that it is almost 12.30 pm – in one of the factory's yards; it drew quite a number of listeners.<sup>186</sup> It is interesting to see that KdF's underlying goal to create

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<sup>184</sup> With all their commitment to culture, the regime's priority was high production rates, so KdF events in factories were strictly restricted to outside work times.

<sup>185</sup> LA Berlin A Rep. 231 Nr. 660; announcement by the *N.S. Betriebszellen Osram Hauptgeschäft und Werk D* from Jun. 1, 1935, "Die N.S.-Gemeinschaft „Kraft durch Freude“ bringt Reichswehr-Musiker in den Betrieb!".

<sup>186</sup> It is quite conceivable that Osram made the attendance mandatory; from several sources, it is obvious that companies did not feel as compelled as the leisure organization to follow a principle of "voluntarism" when it came to leisure activities.



**Factory Concert at Osram :** Fig. 2.1 and Fig. 2. 2 *Wehrmacht* Factory Concert at Osram’s Plant A on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1938 (Archive of German Technical Museum, Berlin I 2 060 ALB 062.)

a close-knit *Volksgemeinschaft* – in the case of these concerts, bringing together soldiers and workers – was already achieved in a spatial way. The soldier-musicians performed directly amidst Osram workers; the photograph, taken from a high-angle, reveals a huge mix of people, soldiers and workers, men and women, unsegregated and standing closely together.

Visual arts, too, were brought to Osram’s workers by KdF. In December 1937 an exhibition organized by the Leisure Department took place in Osram’s show-case building, the *Lichthaus*, in an eastern district of Berlin. On display were varied works by contemporary artists, “Graphic art, aquarelles and oil paintings.” In addition, the show had a more practical component, explaining the creation of graphic art. Overall, its organizers made sure to realize a pedagogical aim through these kinds of events.<sup>187</sup> When the workers came to see the exhibition – of course, outside their work hours, the show being open specifically during lunch break (12-2pm) and after work (4.30-6.30 pm)

<sup>187</sup> Part of my argument is that KdF events were not politically didactic in the sense of directly disseminating Nazi ideological and political ideas.. It is especially interesting, then, that KdF otherwise often concerned itself in a pedagogic role.

– they would not look at the displayed art “independently,” but instead would be led through the exhibition by a guide. The event’s announcement explained the rationale for this, indicating it applied for KdF’s “factory exhibitions” overall:

Through KdF, such art exhibitions have been arranged repeatedly in larger companies. They are supposed to procure for the workers a vivid liaison with valuable works of fine art and furthermore offer them artistic and spiritual inspirations. Through appropriate guided tours by the head of the exhibition, all workers comrades will gain an understanding of the methods of a visual artist, and they will then realize that for his creative work he also requires craftsmanship. [LA Berlin A Rep. 231 Nr. 660; announcement from Dec. 13, 1937 by *Betriebsobmann* Kleeberg to Osram workers.]

The constant link between KdF’s educational urge to bring culture to workers and the leisure organization’s broader goal of building a *Volksgemeinschaft* is clear. The goal of the concert by a military orchestra was to bring soldiers and workers together, while this art exhibition aimed to bridge the gap between workers and artists. Artists, too, according to KdF’s message, are workers of the hand, and thus resemble the people working in Osram’s factories. The two groups, therefore, and particularly the workers, should recognize this kinship. But KdF went further. Not only should the artists be considered workers – but the workers, for their part, should see themselves as artists. Here is where KdF’s goals of building a unified German racial community and of “bringing culture to the workers” directly converge, and here is also where they combined with the organization’s preference for “active participation.” Both producers and consumers of art were considered equals – as were all other members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* – and were consequently interchangeable. KdF’s project to “bring high art to the workers” was, as we saw in the case of factory concerts and exhibitions, understood quite literally in terms of space; at the same time, it also tried to motivate workers to be artistically active. The leisure organization attributed equal value to both professional and amateur art; in fact, it

was constantly engaged in blurring the line between both. For KdF, the output of “joy” was important, and since artistic activity of kind was potentially enjoyable, the leisure organization valued amateur activities as highly as professional ones.<sup>188,189</sup>

KdF’s interventions in Osram varied greatly. From spring 1934 on, when KdF started its work at Osram, until the end of 1935, the leisure organization offered reduced tickets to at least 26 different theater or opera events.<sup>190</sup> In addition, KdF arranged for Osram workers cheap entrance fees to a Berlin horse-racing event, an inexpensive trip to Duisburg to take part in the Rhenish carnival festivities, weekly sightseeing flights over Berlin at reduced prices, and at least 15 social/vaudeville evenings and a minimum of 7 concerts available to Osram workers. Counting just theater and concert style events, an Osram worker in 1934 and 1935 had 48 different leisure options. This number refers to a relatively short period of 21 months (with KdF at Osram starting in March 1934,) meaning that Osram workers had statistically more than two such cultural options per

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<sup>188</sup> In fact, in many cases, as pointed out previously, KdF even prioritized amateur art. This had two reasons: first, engaging amateur theater or dance groups was inexpensive. Second, as discussed in the previous chapter, this was because KdF believed that active involvement in making art of any kind produced strength, and perceived the production of mental or physical strength as its foremost goal.

<sup>189</sup> KdF’s educational impetus led furthermore to the establishment of *Volksbildungsgemeinschaft* for Osram workers. Such a “community for the education of the people” was part of the efforts of KdF’s Institute for the Education of the People, which sent a representative to each German company that had more than 300 employees. His task was to realize within this company the Institute’s goals, which were, as described in an announcement for Osram’s workers, “to connect the German worker with each cultural benefit and progress, to motivate him to advance his intellectual development and to awake and promote cultural talents of all kinds dormant in each individual.” (LA Berlin, A Rep. 1 Nr. 660; “Aufbau der Volksbildungsgemeinschaft Osram Berliner Betriebe.”) At Osram, the Institute ran courses, lectures, music, guided tours, cultural excursions, libraries and amateur productions [*Laienschaffen*]. Prior to KdF’s involvement, Osram already had a company-sponsored orchestra and a choir, as well as leisure groups in the fields of chess and photography for Osram workers. These groups were then subsumed by KdF when setting up a People’s Education Community at Osram. KdF proclaimed that it was eager to “try with all means to enlarge the circle of friends” for these communities. KdF also planned to integrate more folk music, an area that had “withered away before 1933,” into Osram’s choir and orchestra. Another Osram institution that was incorporated by KdF for its educational work was the company’s library. (See *ibid.*)

<sup>190</sup> It might have been more – the number represents the theater and opera performances announced in documents found in one file documenting KdF’s work at Osram. (*Ibid.*)

months to choose from<sup>191</sup> – *not* counting in-factory events and excursions to racing or the carnival.

The leisure activities at Osram, while organized in collaboration with and under the nominal aegis of KdF, were mainly financed by the company. The minutes of the Osram advisory board meetings reveal how (financial) decisions by this body came to shape greatly the outlook of leisure at this company, and clarify how much KdF's work was dependent on the company's consent and financial support.<sup>192</sup> A consistent agenda on the part of the companies, however, cannot be found in board's decisions on funding leisure for the company's workers. For example, in November 1937 Osram generously gave 10,000 *Reichsmark* to finance a lottery supporting KdF trips for workers of the company.<sup>193</sup> Only a year earlier, in October 1936, the board had decided against the installation of a general fund to support workers' travels (as was later done with the 1937 lottery.) The board justified this decision, next to "many other reasons" which remained entirely unexplained, by reference to tax issues. But something more seemed to have been behind the negative verdict. According to the minutes, the board agreed that "one needs to handle the distribution of allowances for KdF trips very carefully, in order to

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<sup>191</sup> Even then, this estimated ratio is probably too low. First, as noted above, I have only counted the activities mentioned in this one file about KdF at Osram – it is not unlikely, however, that there were more events that went unnoticed in that file. Furthermore, for theater and opera events, I have merely counted the plays, not the number of performances available to Osram workers. This number, however, was considerably higher, dramatically increasing the number of actual leisure options available to the individual Osram worker.

<sup>192</sup> In November 1938, for example, Director Krumbeck announced a change to the company's guidelines about financial support for comradeship evenings, according to which it would now contribute to such an evening only once per year (in addition to the fixed May-Day event). According to Krumbeck, the contribution would be 3 – 3.50 *Reichsmark* for each employee and 1- 1.50 RM for each family member participating in this event. (LA Berlin A Rep 231 Nr. 658; minutes from the meeting of Osram's Advisory Board from Nov. 21, 1938.)

<sup>193</sup> When doing so, the advisory board clarified that the company was in fact spending even more money than that in this field, – allowing its workers to participate in the leisure organization's travel offers – in particular by supporting KdF's Italy trips with a "considerable subvention." (LA Berlin A Rep 231 Nr. 658; minutes from the meeting of Osram's Advisory Board from Nov. 24, 1937.)

avoid any abuse.” They also emphasized that those workers should be encouraged “who are particularly reserved in both describing their distress and using offered help.” A statement like this reveals how Osram’s management used its KdF-connected social policy measures as a means to “civilize” its workers. This attitude also lurked behind the decision on funding KdF trips for Osram workers. As mentioned, the board refused to establish a general fund for this matter. Instead, it considered as the “most convenient solution”<sup>194</sup> to strongly encourage the workers to take part in KdF’s discount ticket collection scheme in order to finance a trip. If the individual worker did so and thus his “will for obtaining a holiday trip through own funds was shown,” the company could consider “in seemingly applicable cases” to help out, according to the board.<sup>195</sup> What these cases were could be was not further clarified. However, it seems most likely that well-behaved and diligent workers would qualify for this category rather than troublemakers. Overall, the board’s unwillingness to provide more funds for KdF trips seems to stem from its conviction that many workers did not show enough commitment to attempt financing the trips themselves. A case by case decision about whom to fund provided the Osram management with more influence than it would have had following a more general, non-discriminatory policy on funding KdF travel.<sup>196</sup> Overall, we can see

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<sup>194</sup> The German text uses the term “*günstigste Lösung*.” While this means the “most convenient solution,” “*günstig*” is also the German word for low priced, and while the company does not openly admit this here, such economic consideration might have been in place.

<sup>195</sup> LA Berlin A Rep 231 Nr. 658; minutes from the meeting of Osram’s Advisory Board from Oct. 10, 1936.

<sup>196</sup> Unfortunately, I could not find any references in the sources as to why Osram’s management later changed its attitude on this issue, introducing the aforementioned lottery. The KdF’s growth between 1936 and 1938, especially in the field of travel, might have contributed to this change of mind. Perhaps at some point, Osram simply could not afford anymore to refuse supporting its workers taking part in it, standing against both the leisure organization and demands from workers, who – possibly influenced by the omnipresent propaganda emphasizing this – came to see KdF travel as a part of the Third Reich they were entitled to participate in.

It is important to clarify, however, that such reservation on the part of Osram’s advisory board should not be read as a general opposition to KdF at Osram. In July 1936, for example, the minutes relate the appraisal of the chairman of the

here how Osram used KdF's programming – which Osram had to finance in parts or fully – as tools of inner-company social policing and disciplining. This was only possible because KdF was dependent on the companies, and, related, the execution of KdF events lay more with the company than with the leisure organization.

The situation at Osram was not unique. For example, it resembled in many ways the circumstances at the Berlin's Borsig company, as we will see in the now following analysis of leisure opportunities for Borsig workers.<sup>197</sup> A paragraph taken from the manuscript "The productive man in the factories of *Rheinmetall*" from around 1940 offers a good entry point into this analysis, as it broadly describes the efforts of this company in the field of social policy.

The worker of the *Rheinmetall-Borsig*-corporation's factories [...] will find everything that gives him joy of work and preserves this joy, everything that promotes his health at work, in short everything that boosts his performance and his well-being as a worker in operation in the factories. In a work community animated by the spirit of National Socialism he will contribute to the great goals of the *Führer* with the best of his powers and performances." [Deutsches Technik Museum Berlin, Archiv I.2. 001 574; "Der schaffende Mensch in den Werken der Rheinmetall."]

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managing board, Hermann Schlüpmann, of an art exhibition which displayed paintings, photos and sculptures created by Osram workers. The board stated that holding this event at regular intervals would be "very worthy of consideration," since "the exhibition has shown that amongst workers there is a pronounced desire to be creatively active outside work hours [...]" (Ibid., minutes from the meeting of Osram's Advisory Board from Jul. 6, 1936.)

<sup>197</sup> Borsig was a mechanical engineering company in Berlin, with a focus on the manufacturing of railway locomotives. It was founded in 1837 by Johann Friedrich August Borsig; by the 1870s, it had grown to become Europe's biggest producer of locomotives. In 1898, the company moved to Berlin-Tegel and set up a large factory, which was among the most modern of the age. [The archival records used for this dissertation describe KdF's work at this location.] In the 1920s, the company suffered greatly, and ceased production in 1930 of locomotives at Tegel. It was saved from total liquidation by a merger with the AEG company in 1932, which shortly after took over all of Borsig's shares. The Tegel factory site was sold to the *Rheinmetall*-Company, (*Rheinmetall* is the short version of "*Rheinische Metallwaren und Maschinenfabrik Düsseldorf*," an arms manufacturer from the Western Germany), and Borsig eventually became the the "*Rheinmetall-Borsig AG*. [Most of the material I cite refers to this company, even though, for reasons of simplicity, I will simply call it "Borsig"] In 1938, the company was taken over by the Herman-Göring-Werke, the industrial conglomerate established in 1937 by the Nazis in order to reach a state of autarky in German industries, especially in the realms of heavy industries. [See Barbara Kasper, *Arbeiten für den Krieg: Deutsche und Ausländer in der Rüstungsproduktion bei Rheinmetall-Borsig 1943 - 1945* (Hamburg: VSA-Verl., 1987).13-4 and Max Wessig and Rheinmetall-Borsig AG., *Deutscher Maschinenbau, 1837-1937, im Spiegel des Werkes Borsig*. (Berlin: Worstand, 1937).] With this, Borsig was thus under the direct supervision of Herman Göring himself, and then became a major armament manufacturer, with 18,000 employees, at the end of the war. (This includes forced laborers, whose numbers are growing with each war year. Exact numbers, however, are missing; see Kasper, *Arbeiten für den Krieg*.14.) After the war, Borsig was re-organized and sold several times; it still exists, currently owned by a Malaysian group.

As this citation illustrates, Borsig generally followed the Nazi approach in the area of workers' welfare within German factories. This paragraph concedes quite openly the importance of the performance of individual workers both for the company but also the Third Reich overall, and that socio-political measures should foster this performance. Based on the belief that strong performance would be a consequence of the workers' general well-being and satisfaction at work, Borsig was eager to structure its factories in a way that they could indeed be "producers of happiness" for its employees. Since 1933, at least if we can believe the manuscript's claims, Borsig had been involved in "beautifying" its plants, both its interior rooms as well as its grounds. Accordingly, "in all factories we encounter green areas, [...] flower beds," and next to the Borsig factory in Berlin-Tegel "an extended park area with walks, resting benches [and] sport facilities" was installed. After work, Borsig workers could "relax, educate themselves, do physical exercises, replenish their strength for work," by taking advantage of the "numerous measures and facilities" the company had set up for the promotion of its workers' happiness. There were several "cultural events such as musical evenings, singing evenings, lectures," allowing all workers "to indulge in both relaxation and further education in cultural matters at the same time;" furthermore, "comradeship evenings, mutual trips and steam boat rides [to] bring working comrades together outside their daily work, too." At the Borsig plant in Berlin, the comradeship house in the park adjacent to the factory grounds became the main site for communal leisure events among Borsig's workforce. In addition, the company employed technological means to enable all its workers participate in its cultural and recreational events: "To let all the thousands of factory comrades, who cannot be accommodated in the hall despite its size, take part in



such ceremonies, they are transmitted via speakers throughout the entire plant, into all production shops and offices. During work breaks, the broadcasting facilities in the factory serve to delight the workers in the shops through more music.” For special events, there were factory orchestras and choirs at Borsig.<sup>198</sup>

Interestingly, the manuscript that describes all this does not mention KdF even once. While the report alludes to Germany’s political leadership and clearly aligns itself with Nazi politics and KdF’s ideas of leisure, all recreational institutions and leisure events are solely attributed to the company and its own efforts. Only when addressing the company’s libraries (several of them had been installed for Borsig’s workers,) is a KdF library in the Düsseldorf plant mentioned.<sup>199</sup> Apart from this, there are only a few other instances where the nine-page manuscript references the Nazi leisure organization. At one point it announces that the company had a fund to finance a larger KdF trip for those company workers “who proved themselves particularly worthy through their behavior and their performances.”<sup>200</sup> This statement recalls the above-mentioned case of the Osram company which appears to have used KdF trips (and the support of those) for internal socio-disciplinary practices. In addition, this point actually emphasizes Borsig’s efforts to make its workers happy, and does not stress KdF’s role in this endeavor.

The non-appearance of KdF in this manuscript may speak to the organization’s involvement in Borsig being in fact limited. More likely, this could be the result of an attempt by the company to de-emphasize any involvement of KdF. Borsig might have

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<sup>198</sup> See “Der schaffende Mensch in den Werken der Rheinmetall” (Deutsches Technik Museum Berlin, Archiv I.2.001 574.) [*All previous citations in this paragraph are taken from this source.*]

<sup>199</sup> However, this was only an addition to a company-owned library.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

chosen such an approach to highlight its own efforts – even with KdF involvement, all the described innovations would have been financed by the company – and to use this to advertise the company as forging a closer community of its workers.<sup>201</sup>

A slightly different case offers the situation at the Krupp Company in Essen in the Ruhr area.<sup>202</sup> The relationship between Krupp authorities and the organizers of the leisure organization was not always free of tension and underlying conflicts. KdF started to be active at Krupp in 1934. However, it first worked externally, i.e. through the Essen County's KdF department, rather than through a specific KdF representative at the company itself.<sup>203</sup> Shortly after its foundation, the Essen KdF department approached the Krupp Company and requested to use one of its assembly halls, the *Friedrichshalle*, as a venue for leisure time activities. KdF did not offer to pay any compensation; it wanted to

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<sup>201</sup> Unfortunately, an interpretation of this manuscript is complicated by the fact that its author is unknown, as well as its audience. Is the writer a Borsig-Rheinmetall employee, trying to advertise the company's initiatives in the field of (intended) social policy? To whom does he then address this advertisement – its own workers or a larger audience? Or is the author a KdF organizer, summarizing the situation at Borsig? Given the rare mentions of the leisure organization, the latter reading appears improbable, but cannot be entirely dismissed.

<sup>202</sup> Starting from a small steel-foundry in Essen founded by Friedrich Krupp in 1811, the Krupp company became – under the leadership of Friedrich's son, Alfred Krupp – Europe's largest company in the 19th century. The company was a railway producer and arms manufacturer. At the turn of the century, the Krupp company had ca. 45,000 employees; already by 1870, the factory grounds in Essen had grown to make up about one third of the city's size. During the Third Reich, Krupp became (again, as it had been before the First World War) an important arms manufacturer. After the Second World War, the company was largely dismantled, and the family business was transformed into a corporation, which in 1999 merged with its competitor Thyssen to become the ThyssenKrupp AG, one of the largest steel producers in the world. On the company history of Krupp, see, for example, Lothar Gall, *Krupp: Der Aufstieg eines Industrieimperiums* (Berlin: Siedler, 2000), William Manchester, *The Arms of Krupp, 1587-1968* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2003). Frank Stenglein, *Krupp Höhen Und Tiefen Eines Industrieunternehmens* (Essen: Klartext, 2009). On Krupp's history during the Third Reich (or specific aspects thereof), see Werner Abelshauser, "Rüstungsschmiede der Nation? Der Kruppkonzern im Dritten Reich und in der Nachkriegszeit 1933 bis 1951," in *Krupp im 20. Jahrhundert: Die Geschichte des Unternehmens vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gründung der Stiftung*, ed. Lothar Gall (Berlin: Siedler, 2002), 267–472. Todd Walker, *Forced Labor in Nazi Germany at the Krupp Plants*, 1997. John Gillingham, *Industry and Politics in the Third Reich: Ruhr Coal, Hitler, and Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Gustav Luntowski, *Hitler und die Herren an der Ruhr: Wirtschaftsmacht und Staatsmacht im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000), or Hisashi Yano, *Hüttenarbeiter im Dritten Reich: Die Betriebsverhältnisse und soziale Lage bei der Gutehoffnungshütte Aktienverein und der Fried. Krupp AG, 1936 bis 1939* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1986).

<sup>203</sup> KdF was present in Essen beginning in the spring of 1934. For February of that year, Essen's local newspaper describes the leisure organization's work in Essen. Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, the head of the Krupp company, received an invitation for an inauguration ceremony for KdF in Essen, which took place on March 2, 1934. (See Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 12; "Die Organisation der NS.-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude" in Essen," *Essener Zeitung*, Feb. 2, 1934; and Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125,

use the space for free.<sup>204</sup> The Krupp Company's answer was "yes and no," granting KdF the use of the venue while at the same time denying the request for the specific date, stating the hall had already been given away for the day in question.<sup>205</sup> It is not clear if the room was really occupied that day – possibly Krupp did not want to help KdF, but knew that a direct refusal was not permissible in the political situation of the time.

Later documents indicate that KdF ended up hosting many events in Krupp's *Friedrichshalle*. In December 1934 and in January and February 1935, KdF used the venue – but did not pay for it. Such behavior annoyed Krupp authorities, especially since Essen's KdF organizers did not seem to have communicated that they would not refund Krupp for any expenses in these cases. Accordingly, Krupp's management wrote a somewhat angry letter to the KdF's Essen branch in February 1935. In this letter, Krupp retroactively agreed to waive the costs for KdF's use of the assembly hall. However, it also emphasized that "the net costs" for this event had been "very considerable" and that consequently this dispensation of costs could be only an exception. For future events, Krupp management insisted to the KdF organizers that it would be "absolutely necessary" for "this issue" to be "settled in advance."<sup>206</sup> The irritated, but still accommodating, tone of this letter provides an important insight into Krupp's relationship with KdF. Such a letter was probably the most aggressive step towards the Nazi leisure organization Krupp could afford to take. Not waiving the cost KdF had caused with its

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pag.16; letter by the DAF Essen, section to Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach from Feb. 24, 1934.)

<sup>204</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 25; letter DAF, Essen, Section KdF to firm *Friedr. Krupp Ag* from Mar. 22, 1934.

<sup>205</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 26.

<sup>206</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 68; letter by Krupp's management, directors Stumm and Cunz, to KdF, Essen county, from Feb. 18, 1935. [*Underlining in the original.*]

events was not an option. Generally, sources like this suggest that Krupp's management was annoyed with having to be involved with KdF – and with the leisure organization's growing efforts to become involved in the company's realm of social policy – but simply could not do much about it.

Regardless of potential disenchantment on the part of the company, there were many KdF events at Krupp for its workers – the files list a range of theater performances,<sup>207</sup> film screenings,<sup>208</sup> vaudeville evenings,<sup>209</sup> and concerts<sup>210</sup> – and almost every time, KdF's planning of these events included a request for Krupp to provide access to and to take over the costs of the venue, namely the *Friedrichshalle*. At times, however, Krupp authorities took a stance against KdF and its intrusion and resisted these requests and demands. In 1936, for example, the company refused to buy tickets from KdF (for their workers) for an entertainment event in Essen, with a comment that in itself might very well function as a summary of Krupp's general attitude towards KdF: "Requests of this kind are made to us too often."<sup>211</sup> A year later, the company spoke out more generally against KdF, or at least against the leisure organization's practice of asking the company to buy blocks of tickets for its events. A letter from a November 1937, part of an exchange between KdF and the Krupp AG about such a request, had a

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<sup>207</sup> See, for example, Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125; announcement of Schiller's play *Wallenstein* in "Rundschreiben der Gussstahlfabrik Essen," from May 30, 1934.

<sup>208</sup> See Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 131; internal letter by Krupp's *Konsum-Anstalt* to the company's main administration department from November 18, 1935. Krupp's *Konsum-Anstalt* (in English: "consumption institution") was part of Krupp's welfare program. The institution, established in 1858, ran a restaurant and shops where Krupp's employees could buy for inexpensive prices.

<sup>209</sup> See, for example, Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 280; letter about entertainment program for several different Krupp factories from May 22, 1941.

<sup>210</sup> On concerts for Krupp workers, see Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 266; "Rundschreiben KdF" to Krupp's factory attendant (*Betriebsobmann*) from Oct. 15, 1941.

<sup>211</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 160; letter by the Friedrich Krupp AG to KdF Essen from

typed note on its back, stating that KdF had been notified “that the company is alienated by repeatedly being harassed about the buy-out of a larger amount of concert ticket and such things.”<sup>212</sup> Five years later, Krupp’s management once again acted with what I would say is a resistant attitude towards KdF. In this instance, the company refused to take over any tickets for KdF concerts planned for 1942. Krupp argued that this was due to the unpopularity of KdF’s events in the past with Krupp’s workers:

In the past year, we had great trouble selling the tickets for concert events we had bought from you, despite [...] having been very engaged in advertisement and the tickets being offered at greatly reduced prices. Regrettably, we also had to observe that in more than a few cases tickets we had given out for free remained unused. [Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 268; letter by the Krupp management to the KdF branch in Essen from Oct. 14, 1942.]

Krupp believed that its workers would not be interested in KdF’s concerts, despite the music being “lighter” in comparison to earlier years. The letter by Krupp’s management is a clear critique of KdF events, addressing the latter’s unpopularity among Krupp workers. Furthermore, it shows that Krupp took an openly critical stance against KdF at this moment, something which had not surfaced that clearly before.<sup>213</sup>

Generally, this document, alongside the others discussed above, illustrates that Krupp had a relative independent and sometimes critical stance towards the Nazi leisure organization, even though the company could not always afford to act on its true beliefs.

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Jul. 3, 1936.

<sup>212</sup> See Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 207, back side. The note continued to state the official stance of the company, according to which the company only wanted to support those events for which a success could be safely predicted.

<sup>213</sup> Part of this might be explained by the letter’s late date: by 1942, the Krupp company, as a major armament producer, was important for the Nazi regime and consequently was in a very strong position. Conversely, KdF’s situation within Germany and particularly in German factories had not grown more powerful over the years of the Third Reich. Rather, the war period saw a restriction of funds and opportunities for the leisure organization within Germany. I will address KdF’s situation during World War II in more detail in chapter five.

This attitude had to do with Krupp's own long tradition of social and welfare politics reaching into the private lives of its workers and their leisure time, dating long before the Nazis became active in that sphere or before the Nazi party even existed for that matter. KdF's involvement in this field, then, was perceived by Krupp as a form of invasion and opportunistic use on the part of the leisure organization. And, in many respects, this seems to have been in fact the case. Such an assessment accords with the testimony of former Krupp employee Wilhelm Härlin, used at the Krupp trial in Nuremberg in 1947/48.<sup>214</sup> Härlin stated that there had been "resistance by the company's management against efforts of the [Nazi] party to politicize [social] facilities at Krupp." As an example, he named Krupp's *Bildungsverein* [Educational Society.] According to his testimony, this was by the mid-1930s the largest cultural association in Western Germany, consisting of ca. 10,000 members and 26 different departments, including amongst others things a choir, several orchestras, a chess society and a photography group. According to Härlin, this Educational Society was for the DAF – with its sub-department KdF – "a stubbornly hunted prey," but "despite all efforts the society continued to exist as an independent Krupp institution." This was made possible, Härlin argued, because the company's management backed the society's leadership and "protected it against all attacks."<sup>215</sup> The Krupp company struggled to keep its independence in the field of social policy, according to Härlin, and, to an extent, it succeeded, limiting the space of activity for Nazi organizations such as KdF. Dr. Karl Fuss, head of all cultural institutions at Krupp after

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Of course, it is important to note that Krupp's opposition to KdF might not indicate any anti-Nazi attitude, but rather represents a pragmatic capitalist/ management decision. In other words, a resistance to finance workers' leisure might have been the reason of Krupp's opposition, more than a resistance to the interference from the Nazi regime.

<sup>214</sup> According to the file at the Historical Archive at Krupp, Härlin had been working for Krupp since 1919. Beginning in January 1944, he was the head of the company's personnel department.

1938, confirmed in his Krupp trial testimony such an interpretation of Krupp's distance from KdF in the sphere of cultural works at the company.<sup>216</sup> Fuss stated in a letter from 1947 that, despite his leading position, he was never a member of KdF.<sup>217</sup> None of Krupp's institutions in the field of culture, he contended, had been politicized. In his opinion, they all had remained independent from any National Socialist involvement.<sup>218</sup>

KdF's involvement in the organization of leisure activities and cultural events created conflict in the relationship between companies' management and KdF. In particular, the managements typically struggled to retain (and to emphasize) their predominance when it came to leisure offerings for their workers. However, this resistive aspect withstanding, there *were* many KdF-events for workers in German factories – though these might have happened under the aegis of the individual companies with KdF merely formally involved. KdF's general spirit of “joy-production” for workers was without doubt present, and so was an eagerness to foster community building.

KdF's activities at Osram, Borsig and Krupp also provides important insight into the larger question of how KdF went about in practice when trying to reach its targeted audience of German workers; we also see the role Nazi ideology and its dissemination played in this. As shown, KdF was conspicuously absent from the hands-on running of leisure events in German factories, or at least at the three companies under scrutiny in this chapter. The resistance it faced from the companies' managements partially accounts for

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<sup>215</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, Essen WA 41/ 73-125, pag. 33; testimony of Wilhelm Härlin from March 1948.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., pag. 10; testimony of Dr. Karl Fuss, without date.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., pag. 13-16; letter by Dr. Karl Fuss to Dr. Hennig from Dec. 12, 1947.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, pag. 10; testimony of Dr. Karl Fuss, without date. It is of course important to consider his position at Krupp during the war when attempting to evaluate the truthfulness of his post-war statement. Were Fuss to admit any involvement of Krupp's social or cultural work with the Nazi regime, this would compromise him, too – not necessarily judicially, but morally.

this. However, KdF might not have pushed for more involvement anyway. First, more organizational work on the part of the companies relieved KdF of a burden – such outsourcing, we know, was generally something it was interested in. More importantly, KdF might have stepped back because not much more involvement was necessary: after all, its overall goals, “joy production” and the working towards the building of the *Volksgemeinschaft* were “already” being adhered to and facilitated by the companies. Thus, while the organization was able achieve its goals, it did not engage – and could not, given the hands-off situation it was in, either voluntarily or forcibly – in a more detailed, party-program motivated ‘political education’ (or even “brainwashing”) of its participants. In fact, this approach, which left individuals, both participants and company-affiliated organizers, more space *within* KdF, actually made the leisure organization’s events more successful and thus eventually helped to stabilize the regime.

How were these cultural offerings received by German workers, in factories and beyond? The reception of KdF’s work, especially that in the “cultural” sphere organized by its sub-department *Feierabend*, can be discerned from diverse sources such as reports by the Gestapo and the SD, the SS’s secret service, as well as those from oppositional groups, such as the Sopade, *Neu Beginnen* or the Communist parties. Both oppositional groups and agencies from within the Nazi regime agreed on the popularity of KdF events. They disagreed, however, on what that meant and represented, and thus offer us a lens on the question of whether KdF events helped to stabilize the regime and, if so, how these events facilitated the Nazi aim of winning over workers for their politics and ideology. In addition, testimonies and memoirs commenting on participation in KdF events reveal that KdF events were received positively overall and did shape (some) individuals’ everyday



experiences of the Third Reich considerably. However, these sources suggest that such well-disposed participation in KdF events did not necessarily lead to a subscription of these participants to Nazi ideas and politics. That KdF ‘won over’ individuals for Nazis through its leisure activities does not seem to have been the case. As previously suggested, the way these events were run predisposed this outcome, but also, such an outcome might have been acceptable for KdF. For what KdF events did seem to achieve, however, was to foster a more positive attitude towards the Third Reich. And this development generally stabilized the regime, since it reduced oppositional attitudes and consequent practices. Additionally, reports on KdF’s events confirm KdF’s work was mainly concerned with “joy production,” thus supporting my work’s main argument about the primacy of KdF’s interest in this, and further that this was behind the above mentioned popularity of these events. This focus, and even more so the resulting light and entertaining events KdF organized, were criticized for their lack of standard and tasteless, inappropriate humor. On one level, I see such criticism as additional evidence for my argument about the existence of KdF’s “joy production.” Such criticism also highlights another theme, one discussed already in the previous chapter and which will re-surface throughout the dissertation: the tension between “high” and “low” culture. In other words, KdF’s “bringing culture to workers” did not actually fulfill the expectations about “*Deutsche Kultur*” held by KdF’s critics.

First, let us look in detail at the “positive” reception of KdF and its work. Many Gestapo reports point to the popularity of KdF events, and especially that of comradeship or social evenings.<sup>219</sup> 1935 reports from Aachen claim that KdF events had become “an

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<sup>219</sup> For example, several Aachen Gestapo reports from the spring of 1935 point to the popularity of the leisure organization’s *Bunte Abende* (social evenings). [See Bernhard Vollmer, *Volksopposition im Polizeistaat: Gestapo- und*

institution for the relaxation-seeking population,” and that everyday life in Germany has become unimaginable without them.<sup>220</sup> The socialist group *Neu Beginnen* also attested to the popularity of KdF events in 1934: At an event for Borsig workers at its locomotive factory KdF arranged a steam boat ride for the workers, free of charge, and gave out free beer coupons. The event was a total success: “A workforce of 400, 1,500 people showed up.”<sup>221</sup> Lots of binge drinking and fraternization with the management.”<sup>222</sup>

While fostering binge drinking was not among KdF’s goals, – in principle, it opposed excessive drinking as part of its overall agenda of ‘strengthening – a KdF event like the one described above with its “fraternization with the management” might have indeed helped to further KdF’s goal of building a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The enthusiastic reception of the Borsig steam boat ride does not seem to have been exceptional. A similar positive effect towards KdF’s building of community can be identified in a 1935 comradeship evening in a factory which manufactured gold and silver products. A *Neu Beginnen* report included the following testimony from a participant in the event:

Some time ago, we had a comradeship evening; in addition to good food and abundant drinks, there were also cigarettes and cigars. Then the director gave a speech, and talked among other things about the following: He may be the director, but things would not really depend on titles, but rather on the fact that

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*Regierungsberichte 1934 - 1936*, 2 (Stuttgart: Dt. Verl.-Anst., 1957), 157f, 186f. and 208.) (= “Lagebericht für den Monat Januar 1935,” “Lagebericht für den Monat März 1935,” and “Lagebericht für den Monat April 1935.”)]. For Osnabrück, the Gestapo also reports on the growing appeal and participation numbers in KdF’s singing events, as part of the so-called “Volkssingen,” which was an initiative bringing together people after work and have them sing together. [See Gerd Steinwascher, *Gestapo Osnabrück meldet: Polizei- und Regierungsberichte aus dem Regierungsbezirk Osnabrück aus den Jahren 1933 bis 1936* (Osnabrück: Selbstverlag des Vereins für Geschichte und Landeskunde von Osnabrück, 1995). (= “Lagebericht der Staatspolizeistelle Osnabrück an die Geheime Staatspolizei für den Monat Juni 1935 vom 4. Juli 1935.”)]

<sup>220</sup> Vollmer, *Volksopposition im Polizeistaat*, 251. (= “Lagebericht für den Monat Juni 1935.”)

<sup>221</sup> The large number indicates that employees brought family members of their families.

<sup>222</sup> Bernd Stöver, *Berichte über die Lage in Deutschland: Die Lagemeldungen der Gruppe Neu Beginnen aus dem Dritten Reich 1933-1936* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996), 189. [In the following: *Neu Beginnen*, here report for Jun./Jul. 1934.]

everybody is on board, that everyone was a “people’s comrade” and so on. With this speech, he obviously made an impression [on the audience of workers]. Afterwards, some argued such an evening was an attempt at deception, since it was cheaper than raising salaries; the majority, however, thought that the evening had been very nice, [and remarked that] in the past something like that did not exist. [*Neu Beginnen*, report for Sept./Oct. 1935 (written Nov. 1935,) 629.]<sup>223</sup>

This testimony touches on a couple of themes that re-emerge in other Sopade reports on KdF events for workers. A positive reception on the part of many workers is one of them; we also learn that this was apparently mainly fostered through material incentives, here cigarettes and cigars in addition to free food and drinks. Also, at least for some workers in attendance, this social evening changed how they perceived their boss and their status within the company – towards a Nazi envisioned “racial community.”

Several Sopade reports confirm similar developments as recurring consequences of social evenings; in its reports, the group describes the evenings as having regime-affirming effects on many workers and seeming to help build a unified “racial community,” or being at least a first step into this direction. This was possible, according to Sopade, because the evenings facilitated workers to overcome negative feelings towards their management, and fostered the belief that comradeship between the workers and the management could actually be realized. Indeed, Sopade’s reports developed a disillusioned and somewhat cynical tone as all this seemed rather easily achieved by KdF.

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<sup>223</sup> The participant does not explicitly mention KdF; this specific comradeship evening might have been born out of the initiative of the individual director of the company. Nevertheless, the testimony’s last sentence reveals how the experience of the evening was very much connected to the “new” regime of the Nazi government in the workers’ reception, and thus indirectly, with its organization in the sphere of leisure, which constantly organized, supported and advertised comradeship evenings in its publications. A November 1935 report about the Telefunken company in Berlin seems to confirm this intensification of events in the realm of social policy for worker; it mentions that comradeship evenings would be frequent, and it reads as if this was a new (Nazi induced) development. However, it is dubious whether the comradeship evenings at this company really helped to foster KdF and Nazi ideas. According to the report, these evenings at Telefunken would typically be a “big bender:” “Some workers then tend to extend such an evening until the next morning and arrive in a barely tolerable state at work in the mornings.” (*Neu Beginnen*, 629; report for Sept./Oct. 1935 [written Nov. 1935].) In this instance, KdF’s community building activities appear to have been in fact a drain on the “strength” of German workers.

Free beer and other material incentives were enough to do the trick.<sup>224</sup> In this regard, Sopade noted, KdF leisure events could have a visibly “soporific and bewildering impact.”<sup>225</sup> Comradeship or social evenings were particularly successful in “making an impression on the workers.” KdF seemed to have managed to mute much of workers’ previous class-militant attitude: “In the past, workers were on strikes for weeks because of a 2 cents wage decrease; today they are [already] happy when they have the chance to get drunk together with their director.”<sup>226</sup> Importantly, KdF, in Sopade’s view, did not win over workers by (Nazi) ideas, but rather “bought” them. Thus, Sopade accused KdF of bribing German workers – and the latter in turn of being too susceptible to such bribes:

[...] in the end, the number of beer coupons is pivotal to them. When the boss treats them with enough to eat and to drink and possibly on top springs for a small gift for the women, then [the workers] say: “The old man did indeed open his pockets.” And then a real celebratory mood comes about. [“Aus den Betrieben,” *Sopade*, Apr. 1936, 496.]

Although based on such bribery, in Sopade’s view, KdF events did indeed work towards building something along the lines of a factory community, at least in the perception of the workers:

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<sup>224</sup> Many Sopade reports emphasize the role that alcohol and drinking played at these events – and how this feature was often very important for the evenings’ success. (See, for example, *Sopade*, May 1935, 580.) Here it is reported from Silesia that for a comradeship evening at an AEG factory in the town of Anaberg, each participant received a free bottle of wine. Subsequently, “all night, there was carousal and uproar, and you could hear from various people, that that was great. With such events, the Nazis seem to be more successful than with the other events they offer.” On the topic of the role of alcohol at KdF events (and, in particular, its effects), see also the previous footnote. A different 1935 Sopade report, this time for Saxony, stressed in addition how important other material incentives were for workers and their willingness to attend these evenings. In this report, a worker compares two comradeship evenings, the first one taking place on May-Day. For this event, the workers received coupons for drinks and food with the value of 2.40 *Reichsmark*. In addition, women were given a bar of chocolate and men five cigars or a packet of cigarettes. At the later comradeship evening in June, no such gifts were handed out and the workers were asked to pay for drinks and food themselves. According to the report, in contrast to the earlier event, “not even half of the workforce was in attendance.” (*Sopade*, Jul. 1935, 793f.) Note that cigarettes and cigars as material incentives were also present at the 1935 comradeship evening described previously on page 33, based on a *Neu Beginnen* report. (= *Neu Beginnen*, 629; report for Sept./Oct. 1935 [written Nov. 1935].)

<sup>225</sup> “Aus den Betrieben,” *Sopade*, Apr. 1936, 496. Adopting a conciliatory tone towards the workers, the report added “that not even intellectuals could elude [this effect].”

<sup>226</sup> *Sopade*, Mar. 1935, 285.

Especially in smaller companies [...] the illusion of true comradeship emerges easily from these comradeship evenings. But even in bigger firms one can hear the opinion that it will do no harm to a manager if he once has to dance with a female factory worker. [Ibid.]

Thus, overall, Sopade reports are evidence for KdF's popularity and also seem to indicate that the leisure organization's events functioned beneficially towards the Nazi goal of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*. Other Nazi ideas, however, did not play a role for KdF's popularity, according to Sopade, nor were workers being won over ideologically, attending the events despite more than because of this background.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, in some of their reports, Sopade commentators even tried to argue that participation in KdF events was a quasi-oppositional activity, far removed from fulfilling any Nazi goals. A 1935 Sopade report, for example, chronicles the following general attitude of the population in northwest Germany towards KdF's entertainment activities:

KdF's evening events are often very well attended. They provide light entertainment, even if visitors always also had to swallow a lot of Nazi-nonsense. But they are inexpensive opportunities to find easy relaxation. They also offer the opportunity to very casually meet up with good old friends and animatedly discuss, with a glass of beer, exactly the opposite of what the evening's organizers had aimed for. [Sopade, Jul. 1935, 846.]<sup>228</sup>

I believe it is debatable whether the behavior described in this report can be evaluate as (passive) resistance or should be rather seen as a form of opportunism or accommodation. Other reports tend to support the second reading; for example, a Sopade report from December 1935 reinforces the reading that workers became active in KdF or participated in its events out of a certain attitude of opportunism or even entitlement (by the same

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<sup>227</sup> For example, the above cited report from April 1936 begins with the statement that "speeches from DAF or KdF can be a nuisance for workers," one that was possibly put up with because of KdF's materialistic offers, such as free beer. ("Aus den Betrieben," *Sopade*, Apr. 1936, 496.)

<sup>228</sup> This view was seconded in another Sopade report at the end of the same year, this time covering the Ruhr area. Here, it also said that KdF evening events often functioned as "the best meeting points of old comrades [socialist workers] and their families. The stupid Nazi-blarney is tolerated, [so the workers are able] to, at least sometimes, meet up in a social context." (*Sopade*, Dec. 1935, 1458.)

token, however, the report maintains that workers did not participate out of support for the Nazi regime, nor even credited the regime in any way for the organization of these events.)<sup>229</sup> A report from Hamburg also exemplifies this opportunism: Sopade relayed in 1936 that the workers were no longer opposed to KdF and its activities, but had rather turned into eager participants, applying the simple consideration: “If our money is spent that way, we at least would like to get as much as possible for ourselves out of it.”<sup>230</sup>

Overall, Sopade was constantly ‘forced’ to publish reports about KdF’s (growing) popularity.<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, for Sopade, (mass-scale) workers’ participation in KdF events was not a sign of their political commitment to the regime, but was rather an opportunistic, materialistically motivated choice, or, slightly differently, a sort of resignation to a situation that simply could not be altered fundamentally.<sup>232</sup> However, even if we allow this reading that worker participation in KdF events was not a sign of – and did not lead to – their subscribing to Nazi ideas, it is still important to note that this outcome could still be seen as a success for KdF. One element of this success would be that KdF *did* “mute” workers’ opposition to the Nazi regime. Furthermore, large scale

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<sup>229</sup> See *Sopade*, Apr. 1939, 463.

<sup>230</sup> *Sopade*, Dec. 1936, 1461. A similar attitude towards KdF and its activities can be found in more reports. Other instances are, for example, a 1938 Sopade report from southwest Germany (*Sopade*, Feb. 1938, 166) and a report from 1939 (*Sopade*, Apr. 1939, 463).

<sup>231</sup> In this context, Sopade was compelled to admit that their early assessments (from 1933 to 1935) about KdF’s non-popularity and their prognosis of the organization’s eventual failure had been mistaken; instead, it had to recognize the opposite: KdF had become bigger and more popular. (*Sopade*, Feb. 1938, 151.)

<sup>232</sup> This reading is also supported by a 1937 Sopade report from Berlin. About a factory evening with vaudeville performance, the report says: “The event lacked any political touch. [...] The evening was a success in terms of the vibe, but hardly in a political respect; today, one already accepts these factory events as a matter of course (*Sopade*, Mar. 1937, 343.). On Sopade’s vehement assessment that workers’ participation in KdF events did not mean that they were pro-Nazi, see also *Sopade*, Feb. 1938, 165. Some reports, however, such as the one from East Frisia in 1935, cast doubt about the workers’ full understanding of what it meant if they participated in KdF events, the report complained that many of the participants were entertained and lacked “a consciousness to boycott such festivities” on the part of German workers. (*Sopade*, Dec. 1935, 1458.) A later Sopade report from Berlin established that workers knew about what Sopade categorized as the manipulative side of KdF (“workers feel very well that with KdF, wool is pulled over their eyes.”) and participated nevertheless. (*Sopade*, Apr. 1939, 468.)

participation in KdF events might have had broad positive propagandistic value for the leisure organization and the Nazi regime overall. Sopade was in fact aware of this: a 1939 report pointed out that workers' participation, even without commitment to the Nazi state, helped KdF to reach its "propagandistic purpose [...] after all."<sup>233</sup>

The Sopade perception that KdF's popularity was not a sign of Nazi ideology gaining footholds amongst German workers was contradicted from reports by Nazi authorities which conversely argued that KdF's popularity did indeed translate into a "winning over" of German workers to National Socialism. A 1935 report from Erfurt, for example, stated that KdF's after-work activities were gaining "more and more enthusiastic devotees, who become the best propagandists for the movement's measures in the factories."<sup>234</sup> Similarly, a 1935 Gestapo report from Merseburg, Saxony, stated: "Through [KdF's] events numerous workers have been won over for National Socialism, as generally is reported."<sup>235</sup>

In the same vein, reports compiled by the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service, SD in short) of the SS generally offer a positive evaluation of KdF events and effects. A 1938 report credits KdF with offering an "effective adjustment" to the deficits that social life in Germany had had to suffer due to the "difficult economical tasks, especially in the last

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<sup>233</sup> Sopade, Apr. 1939, 468.

<sup>234</sup> Alexander Sperr and Hermann-Josef Rupieper, *Regierungsbezirk Erfurt: Die Lageberichte der Geheimen Staatspolizei zur Provinz Sachsen 1933 bis 1936*, vol. Bd. 3 (Halle (Saale): Mitteldt. Verl., 2006). (= "Lagebericht der Staatspolizeistelle Erfurt für Januar 1935."). This is echoed by a 1934 Gestapo report from Köslin, Pommernania [See Robert Thévoz et al., *Pommern 1934/35 im Spiegel von Gestapo-Lageberichten und Sachakten* (Cologne: Grote, 1974). (= "Lagebericht der Staatspolizeidienststelle Köslin an das Geheime Staatspolizeiamt über den Monat Juli 1934.")]

<sup>235</sup> Alexander Sperr and Hermann-J. Rupieper, *Regierungsbezirk Merseburg: Die Lageberichte Der Geheimen Staatspolizei Zur Provinz Sachsen 1933 Bis 1936*, vol. Bd. 2 (Halle (Saale): Mitteldt. Verl., 2004). (= "Lagebericht des Regierungspräsidenten Merseburg für März und April 1935," from May 9, 1935.)

In addition, KdF reports also indicate that many KdF events reached Germans of all classes; see Steinwascher, *Gestapo Osnabrück meldet*, 456. (= "Bericht des Gendamerie-Abteilungsbereichs Neuenhaus des Kreises Bentheim an den Kommandeur der Gendamerie in Osnabrück," Mar. 18, 1935.) This report states: "Recently, KdF has arranged in this

year.”<sup>236</sup> Another report from spring 1938 emphasizes how successful KdF was with its art exhibitions in East Prussia, Thuringia, Berlin and Silesia. These exhibitions, said the report, saw KdF awakening an interest in fine art among a large part of the German working class.<sup>237</sup> Similar “success” was observed for the realm of theater and for KdF’s educational branch.<sup>238</sup> A 1939 report confirmed that overall, KdF had had “the most beautiful successes:” and that its “diverse efforts led to the noticeable increase of work-joy and [...] performance.” The positive consequences of this were, according to the report, twofold, both economic and socio-political, in that “these developments benefit the companies, so that the money spent on these things paid themselves off,” and secondly “that this gives the worker motivation for a productivity increase and achieves a comradely relationship between management and *Gefolgschaft*.”<sup>239</sup>

When considering KdF’s impact, it is also instructive to consult some testimonial evidence. Even if this can only be impressionistic, given the small scale of the sample

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district concert and educational evenings. The participation from the population, from all classes, is good.”

<sup>236</sup> Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938 – 1945. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS*, Volume 6, (Herrsching 1984), 205. [in the following: *Meldungen aus dem Reich*; here “Jahreslagebericht 1938 des Sicherheitshauptamtes.”]

<sup>237</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 1037. [here Nr. 80 from Apr. 22, 1940.]

<sup>238</sup> On the success of KdF theater, see *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 117 and 205. [= “Jahreslagebericht 1938 des Sicherheitshauptamtes“, vol. 2 and 3.] For Koblenz, in the Rhineland, SD reports also attest to the popularity and success of KdF’s work through its *Volksbildungswerk* (Institute for the Education of the People), which included classes in foreign languages, stenography, drawing, mathematics, photography, etc. as well as lectures about historical and political topics. According to the SD report, these latter included lectures on the “first principles of National Socialism,” considered, in addition to the above mentioned topics, an important aspect for perfecting the individual’s general knowledge. This is in line with my previous assessment of the *Volksbildungswerk* as the most openly or actively “Nazi” department of KdF. (See Peter Brommer and Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz., *Die Partei hört mit : Lageberichte und andere Meldungen des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS aus dem Grossraum Koblenz, 1937-1941* (Koblenz: Verlag der Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz, 1988). [= „Lagebericht vom 29/30. 11. 1938 für den Monat November 1938“]). According to report from 1938, the Institute did not generate many costs, but was very popular (“The individual work groups are fully booked”; *ibid.*)

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.(= “13. Lagebericht von 25.5. 1939 für die Monate April und Mai 1939.”) “*Gefolgschaft*” means literally: “following” and was the Nazi term for the workforce of a company.



included in the remainder of this chapter,<sup>240</sup> the inclusion of such individual voices reflecting on their experience with the leisure organization will enlarge our understanding of KdF's overall reception. The memoirs and testimonies I have found and will discuss in the following do not support the thesis that KdF events helped to win Germans over to the Nazi (political) agenda. But we can see from these reports that KdF and its cultural offerings could at times shape individual Germans' everyday lives and their outlook on these.

One example is the memoir of Helmut R. He was a commercial apprentice in Kassel, Hesse from 1937 on, and remembers his regular visits to the theater. In his diary, he stressed how going to the theater was only possible for him because of KdF's practice of giving out inexpensive tickets; he was thus able to purchase a monthly subscription for 60 *Pfennig*, allowing him to go to one show per month. He wrote that, at the time, these theater visits were very important to him. Thus, it appears that KdF and its offerings had a significant impact on his life and presumably also his sense of well being.<sup>241</sup> It is surely fair to suspect that he was not the only one who perceived KdF as a beneficial factor in his life, even though there are not many other similar first-hand that accounts describe such (positive) reception of KdF's cultural offerings.

We gain an additional impression of about what these theater visits, possible for some people for the very first time because of KdF, meant for an individual member of the working class and her outlook on life from the diary of Ida T., a young gardener. She

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<sup>240</sup> The limits of this sample are grounded in the difficulty discussed in the introduction of this dissertation: it proved impossible to find first person sources that described their experiences with KdF. (See introduction for a more detailed discussion of this absence and what it might tell us about KdF and individuals' experience with it.)

<sup>241</sup> DTA, 1317/ II. Full name of diary writer is known to author, but shortened in compliance with anonymization regulations.

described attending a performance of *Das kleine Hofkonzert* [The Little Court Concert]<sup>242</sup> on a warm evening in June. For the occasion, she wore her “long, bright-blue dress,” and she thought she looked very pretty:

It is a such a nice feeling to be well and lightly dressed, to move around among other elegant people, in addition to the warm night, and the light, flowing play on stage. That is called “life.” [DTA, 1512,3; full name of diary writer known by author, but shortened in compliance with anonymization regulations.]

For Ida, going to the theater that night was clearly a sublime experience, and part of this was that she could “move among other elegant people.” Thus, she enjoyed a certain bourgeois lifestyle that she might not actually otherwise have participated in as a gardener and daughter of a miner. Her diary confirms an aspiration among German workers to more culture and its associated glamour. This aspiration, of course, had been asserted again and again in KdF propaganda, and the leisure organization had promised to realize just such “desires.”

Not everybody’s memories of theater experiences enabled by KdF had this ‘grandiose’ tone, however. Take the case of Hermann B., born in 1909, who was a worker at Krupp from 1935 until 1944. In a post-war interview he said that KdF enabled him to go to the theater. In fact, he emphasized that, during the period of the Third Reich, he attended operas and theater performances more frequently than at any other point in his life. However, he did not attach much importance to this experience. Hermann B’s report confirms KdF’s success in bringing “culture” to the German workers. But he himself did not bring up the matter to credit the leisure organization for something like this. Nor did he claim that their (inexpensive) offerings were a direct incentive for him to go to the theater or the opera house. Instead, his reasoning is much simpler and not at

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<sup>242</sup> This was a musical comedy written by Edmund Nick from 1935; a year later, the piece was adapted as a movie of

all related to the Nazi leisure organization. He visited operas and theaters so frequently at the time, he says, only because “nothing else was going on.” However, even if B., as Social Democratic worker, was more than reluctant to give KdF any credit, it is still true that his going to the theater *was* made possible by KdF, and so the leisure organization’s offerings became part of his everyday experiences, although he did not subscribe at all to its goals or those of the Nazi state overall.

His interview also gives us an insight into the question about the relationship between Nazi ideology and KdF in the reception of those who attended KdF events – or, in other words, to what extent the attendees even perceived KdF as a Nazi organization. We learn that Herman B., part of the Social Democratic milieu, the son of Social Democratic worker and himself later a member of the post-war SPD and the labor union, was in fact in charge of organizing KdF events and trips.<sup>243</sup> His report does not clearly identify the KdF as a distinct “National Socialist” organization. He likened KdF’s head organization, the German Labor Front, to the post-war unions. Thus, from his report, and especially from the fact that he was (partially) in charge of KdF events, an image of KdF emerges that makes it appear as a rather apolitical agency, merely committed to offering leisure and recreational activities.<sup>244</sup>

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the same title by the UFA; in 1945, there was a remake, which was then released in 1950.

<sup>243</sup> In the interview, he does not directly say that he worked as a KdF-attendant at Krupp. However, when asked about the leisure organization, he answers: “KdF? Yes, it was basically like this, well, the people came to me and said ‘I would like to do this and this trip’ and then that was taken down, there was a form, just like today at a travel agency.” Later, he also mentions that he had control over a contingent of KdF tickets for the opera and the theater, and he also says that he would organize comradeship evenings at Krupp, that are subsidized by the company. (Archiv “Dt. Gedächtnis,” transcript of interview with Hermann B. from Nov. 4 and 10, 1981 and Feb. 24, 1982, interviewer Ulrich Herbert. [For all sources from this archive: full names known by author, shortened in compliance with anonymization regulations.]

<sup>244</sup> This fits in with what Ulrich Herbert writes when summarizing the interviews he did with worker in the Ruhr on their experiences in the Third Reich: “[F]or all interview partners, KdF-trips appear as a good thing. [...] Even an opponent of the Nazis can remember KdF trips entirely positively. [...] Partial dissent with Fascist politics can certainly allow for consent in other areas.” Ulrich Herbert, “Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten. Überlegungen zur diachronen

That a Social Democratic-minded worker such as Hermann B. worked for KdF was by no means a freak occurrence. Furthermore, Hermann B. worked for KdF with no resistant, or “undermining agenda.”<sup>245</sup> This also was not usual. Another example of a Social Democratic worker being active for KdF is that of Krupp worker Ernst B. Here, too, his activity did not seem to have raised any ideological concerns on his part – and this probably because Nazi ideology was not seen as a prominent element of KdF. Ernst B. was born in Essen in 1906, very much into the Social Democratic milieu as both parents were party members.<sup>246</sup> Beginning in 1927, Ernst B. worked at Krupp. He had been a member of the youth organization of the USPD and later, that of the SPD. Already, during the period of his apprenticeship, Ernst B. had been fired several times because of his union-activities; and this happened again in 1933, when he was fired from Krupp. He later became a bus driver, some times driving for KdF’s Travel Department. The apparent discrepancy of his politics and that of this latter employer were not only no problem for him, but also not one for KdF: his political background did not seem to worry the leisure organization – or they did not even check.<sup>247</sup> However, while his post-war interview thus suggests that involvement with KdF did not mean “nazification,” it also reveals that this

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Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews,” in *“Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll”. Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet. (Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet, 1930 bis 1960,* ed. Lutz Niethammer (Berlin: Dietz, 1983), 91. (Herbert, “Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten,” 91. Important is Herbert’s interpretation of these statements, which in fact challenges their factual validity: “Emphasizing normality is here also a reaction to the suspected expectations of the listening interviewer – and thus has a precautionary, so to speak, apologetic character. [...] ‘politics’ are banished to places outside one’s own perception, in order to both live and survive.” Herbert, “Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten,” 91. Testimonies, we learn here, might tell us more about people’s dealing with the past than the past itself; that is, they are better used to learn about peoples’ memories of the past than to reconstruct it.

<sup>245</sup> Such resistance practices, which led to individuals and groups infiltrating KdF as a means of fight the Nazi state and its organization will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>246</sup> From 1917 to 1923 they even had been members of the more radical USPD, before they re-joined the SPD in 1923.

<sup>247</sup> Ernst B. continued his political work for the SPD and the union after the war, becoming a member of the parliament of North-Rhine-Westphalia and leading figure in its SPD fraction.

was not always the case: not all Social Democrats who worked for KdF remained loyal to their leftist beliefs. Ernst B. recounts that he met a friend from his youth days, a former member of the SPD, who now was a KdF leader:

And I go to him and say a friendly “Hello” [*“Guten Tag”*] to my Jupp, and he stands at attention: “Heil Hitler, that’s what that’s called.” That was a small shock for me. [Archiv “Dt. edächtnis;” transcript of interview with Ernst B. from Dec. 14, 1981 and Aug. 17, 1982, interviewer Alexander von Plato.]

What is most interesting about this episode is not how surprised or shocked Ernst B. is to realize his former friend now seems to be a staunch Nazi, but that it took a conversation (albeit brief) to reveal this. Ernst B. initially assumes that the other would have remained Social Democrat. But should that not be the surprising part? After all, he met this person at a KdF event, and the other was there as a KdF leader!<sup>248</sup> Nevertheless, this did not make Ernst B. think of his friend as Nazi. This instance again suggests how KdF, when encountered in and through everyday practices, was not necessarily or immediately connected by its participants to the Nazi regime and its ideology.

A likewise somewhat “apolitical” image of KdF is also confirmed in an interview by Elfriede S., who was born in 1910 in Bochum and who was also situated in the Social Democratic working class milieu.<sup>249</sup> In a 1980s interview, she said that the leisure organization’s social evenings had been very nice, just like the ones she visited at the time of the interview. Her statements suggest that she really enjoyed KdF events:

Yes, yes, those were nice events. Yes. [...] Nice afternoons, they had. Such a *bunter Nachmittag* [social afternoon, literally: colorful afternoon] In fact they

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<sup>248</sup> In the interview, Ernst B. goes on to mention another aspect about which upset him in regards to this episode. He explains that he never talked to his friend anymore during the period of the Third Reich; but in the present time (of the interview), the former friend would probably refute all this if asked. Indeed, the man in question also avoided Ernst B. after their interaction at the KdF event, but did join the SPD after the war again, even securing “a nice position”, as B. bitterly notes.

<sup>249</sup> Her mother was a SPD member (the father had died when S. was seven); from 1939 on, she worked at *Bochumer Verein*, a mining and steel company, first handling an industrial forging hammer, later working as a crane operator.

were even very nice.. [...] Yes, those were very nice. Yes indeed, those were very nice.” [Archiv “Dt. Gedächtnis;” transcript of interview with Elfried S. from Jul. 21 and Nov. 20, 1983, interviewer Streiter.]

The last sentence, which S. repeats, includes the word “*doch*” in the German original, which functions both as emphasis as well as a “however;” perhaps, Elfriede S. felt obliged to refute the implied criticism on the part of the interviewer when asking about KdF.

Individual voices from participants in KdF events thus confirm on the one hand the positive reception of these events and how they did indeed help to change their everyday lives in the Third Reich in a beneficial manner. At the same time, they do not comment on a deep political or ideological content. Of course, it is important here to take such statements with a grain of salt; in particular, those that are part of post-war interviews might have deliberately deemphasized Nazi elements, not wanting to admit to having taken part in – or enjoyed – “Nazi” events. Regarding such concerns, perhaps we could note that even so, it is still interesting that the interviewees specifically wish to draw attention to positive aspects of KdF rather than downplaying the organization altogether.

Let’s briefly turn back from these “individual” voices to views in Gestapo and SD reports. In addition to speaking to KdF’s popularity and “success,” an analysis of these reports brings to light another theme: criticism from within the Nazi state about the content of KdF events and the way they were conducted. Often, the overall quality of these events was criticized. Especially KdF vaudeville evenings faced consistent complaints about their low quality and inappropriate humor and jokes. A good example is a report from November 1935 by the Gestapo Potsdam. After having remarked on the popularity KdF events usually enjoyed, the report went on to criticize the following:

Unfortunately, at times it could be detected that the jokes, which were presented by the so-called “announcer,” were of very low quality, which caused irritation among many in the audience. It cannot be the task of KdF mainly out of concerns for provision of work, to provide employment, which is undesired from a cultural-political standpoint, for those artists, which grew up in the atmosphere of Jewish Cabaret. [...] Everything which looks like Jewish chaffing [*jüdischer Witzelei*], must not be promoted by a Nazi organization. The best form of humor is the funny tale or the anecdote, especially the one in dialect. It can be bawdy, but not purposefully piggish [Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, ed., *Der Regierungsbezirk Potsdam* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 389. (= “Lagebericht der Staatspolizeistelle Potsdam für November 1935,” Dec. 4, 1935.)]

This report is one of many that is critical towards KdF events. It is somewhat unique, however, in its very evident anti-Semitic streak. The basic target of this criticism, however, remains the same throughout the Third Reich:<sup>250</sup> KdF performances, especially vaudeville evenings and their jokes were deemed to be of “low quality.” The Gestapo, but also and even more so commentators on behalf of Goebbels’ Propaganda Ministry accused KdF of presenting jokes that too dirty and “purposefully piggish,” while KdF artists and announcers were criticized as too amateurish.

Almost the very same critique – less the anti-Semitic undertones – is also present in many Sopade reports. For example, a 1936 report speaks about “lowly vaudeville of the most inferior kind” at KdF evening events: “Insinuating, dumb and impertinent expressions out of the swamp of lowly eroticism are common.”<sup>251</sup> This report from Berlin also mentions people’s severe disappointment with KdF offerings in the realm of theater; it is generally assumed, the report states, that only the second or third cast of the theater is employed for performances organized by KdF.<sup>252</sup>

Another telling example of Sopade’s recurring critique of the content and quality

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<sup>250</sup> Critical comments, however, seem more frequent and harsher in tone the longer KdF is in existence.

<sup>251</sup> *Sopade*, Jul. 1936, 885.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

of KdF events is the following case. In Westphalia, the leisure organization was also active in entertaining Germans at carnival, thereby attempting to participate in the traditional festivities for this occasion in the West of Germany. A 1936 Sopade report called KdF's initiatives in this realm "massive," with KdF organizing "one party after the other." Most upsetting for the Sopade author was the opportunistic and low-standard program that KdF offered in this context:

Here theater, then also political cabaret (of such platitudes!) [and] Nigger-music [*Negermusik*], too, is in fashion again in this wrestling for good vibes [*Ringem um Stimmung*]. An original Negro band from Honolulu gives a concert. The music comes from a NSBO band. Probably those are Aryans blackened with boot polish. [...] If this all would not be so sad, one could laugh about it. All of it delirium, delirium.

[...] it is unbelievable how this is possible. The most stupid means are just about good enough to fog the mind of the German worker. Everybody runs riot.[...] The most tasteless and eccentric ideas emerge. Here one can discern a degree of stupidity and lack of wit, which is simply impossible to surpass. Hopefully this humbug – there's no other word for it! – comes to an end soon. [*Sopade*, Feb.1936, 165.]

Clearly the author of this report directs his rant mostly at the KdF event for lacking any standard or decency.<sup>253</sup> However, some of his anger also clearly results from the fact that workers, in no small numbers, readily participated in these events, allowed themselves be "fogged" and apparently enjoyed all the "stupidity." The report began its account of KdF's carnival participation with the claim that "today in Germany, merriness, too, has to

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<sup>253</sup> Interestingly, critique about a lack of standards for KdF events came also from the very top ranks of the Nazi regime, in the person of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. In several instances, he mentions *Kraft durch Freude* in his diary. (The first time, it is referred to October 1933 in the context of a meeting of Goebbels with Robert Ley, discussing the set-up of a "*Feierabend-Organization*" (after-work-time organization); Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998) Part I, Vol. 2/III, 294; entry from Oct. 19, 1933. His entries suggest that he was rather enthusiastic and supportive of the foundation of the leisure organization (For example, "[It] will be a very huge movement." ("*Wird ein ganz großes Werk.*") [Ibid. Part I, Vol.2/III, 324; entry from Nov. 28, 1933.] During the war, his occupation with KdF grows – due to the leisure organization's involvement in the entertainment of *Wehrmacht* soldiers and during this period, his critique of KdF's performances and its qualities will also grow more pronounced [see chapter five of this dissertation].) On August 1, 1936, Goebbels assumes, for the first time, a critical tone toward the organization when reflecting on his participation in a KdF event in Berlin that night (which appears to have been a *Bunter Abend* [social evening]): "Gigantically busy [*Riesenbetrieb*]. And a somewhat mediocre program. I abscond soon. Sometimes all this gives the impression of *panem et circenses*. But to an extent it has to be like that. (Ibid. Part I, Vol.3/II, 145; entry from Aug. 1, 1936.)



be organized.” In Nazi Germany, merriness was indeed organized, and, most importantly, successfully so.

There was a somewhat surprising alignment of views across Gestapo, Goebbels and Sopade. All of them displayed a disdain for “tasteless” low-brow culture and called for more quality when it came to KdF performances. KdF was hardly bothered by the Sopade comments, if it knew about them at all. It is more noteworthy that KdF seems to have also ignored critical reports from other Nazi agencies, even if these were directly sent to the organization and its leaders. For KdF, even “tasteless” events were ultimately acceptable, since they most likely helped to further its agenda of bringing joy and entertainment to the masses.

In this context, it is important to distinguish a different criticism of KdF also present in some Gestapo reports. There are misgivings about its “joy production” overall, or the extent of it, unrelated to the perceived quality of KdF’s events. Even when deeming the humor, say, of KdF events appropriate, some Gestapo reports warn about the danger of what could be called “too much Strength through Joy.” These warnings cite complaints about a “too rapid course of activities and festivities.” The authorities in Aachen, for example, were concerned that a surfeit of KdF events might lead to a loss of interest among the population in the organization’s offerings. But the author of this report, Aachen’s Gestapo head, Hans Nockermann, also worried that a superabundance of KdF programs meant people missing out on events due to financial constraints or, simply, lack of time.<sup>254</sup> In short, the concern seems to be that KdF is not set up to be an omnipresent, totalitarian organization – the sort of Nazi organization we might expect the Gestapo to

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<sup>254</sup> Vollmer, *Volksopposition im Polizeistaat*, 133. (= “Lagebericht für den Monat November 1934” der Staatspolizeistelle für den Regierungsbezirk Aachen.)

approve. By contrast, KdF appeared to want to appeal as much as possible, with a broad and flexible array of events rather than a strictly-conceived “compulsory program.”<sup>255</sup>

Not all reports on KdF, of course, confirm that the organization was popular and not all the evidence speaks to KdF being really successful with its events, especially in regards to the aspiration of “bringing joy.” In fact, quite a few reports from leftist oppositional groups support exactly the opposite view. A 1934 report by *Neu Beginnen*, for example, relayed that a social evening for the workers of vehicle company Ambi-Budd in Berlin was attended by only 300 people, quite a poor showing for a workforce of 2,000. Furthermore, even many of the 300 attendees probably did not come because they really wanted to, but rather because of “with gentle pressure to appear [...] and to bring along their family members.”<sup>256</sup> KdF does not seem to have been popular at this company.

Sopade reports, too, discussed KdF events which were not well received by workers. One such instance is a 1935 concert organized for the female workers of a large textile factory in Saxony. Sopade reported on the workers’ strong discontent about the event, and highlighted that it caused them several practical disadvantages. The concert, given by a student choir that performed folk songs, took place in the factory during the workers’ lunch break, which had been moved for the occasion from noon to one o’clock:

With rumbling stomachs, the factory girls listened to the songs. At one o’ clock they could finally eat. Subsequently, they were given the opportunity to dance with the students in an emptied out hall until 2 o’clock, so that in this way the *Volksgemeinschaft* could find its expression. The management then served a

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<sup>255</sup> Similar feedback, for *one* specific event, can be found in the diary of the gardener Ida T. In the summer of 1937, Ida T. visited a large vaudeville evening organized by KdF in her home town in the Ruhr area, in the tent of the Circus Sarasani. She writes in her diary that the “3.5 hours [of] artistry, ballet, trapeze art and beautiful music,” overwhelmed her: “Too much of a good thing.” According to her diary, this KdF event was enormously popular with “thousands of people” attending every night. (DTA, 1512,3.)

<sup>256</sup> *Neu Beginnen*, 189; report for Jun./Jul. 1934.

midday meal at 2 o'clock for the student singers in a special room. Afterwards the workers were told [...] that they had to make up for the lost hours of work by working 15 minutes longer for a few days. Since many workers lived outside Leipzig, they missed their trains and thus a lot of free time during these days [of extra-work]. The local press referred to the singing of the students as "Socialism of the Deed." Amongst the female workers, however, there was no such enthusiasm. They said: "What do we get from the singing of the students, if we have to pay for it by working extra time!" Also, the workers asked themselves who was paying for the feast that was offered to the students. [*Sopade*, Sept. 1935, 1071.]

We can safely assume that the described event was organized by KdF, especially given its character and its obvious motivation of building the *Volksgemeinschaft*. However, the Sopade report casts doubt whether this was ultimately successful. It also does not sound as though it brought (the KdF-desired) happiness to the women workers, nor a sense of *Volksgemeinschaft* with the students. For these women, the KdF concert disturbed their lunch and was an (unwanted) sacrifice of free time and manpower, all unwanted unasked for.

Such complaints were mirrored by others; a 1937 Sopade report relayed that in Bavaria, too, KdF's concerts in factories were unpopular because they took place during the workers' lunch hour. Additionally, workers complained that they did not like the kind of music (often classical) performed.<sup>257</sup> Workers of a contract business in Saxony were unhappy about its company's comradeship evening in 1936, because "each worker had to carry out three overtime hours, to cover the expense [for the evening], even those workers who could not attend the evening due to their long commute to the work place"<sup>258</sup> Overall, reports such as these suggest that many workers had little agency in KdF's "production of joy." KdF events in fact often had negative consequences for them, mostly

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<sup>257</sup> *Sopade*, Mar. 1937, 344.

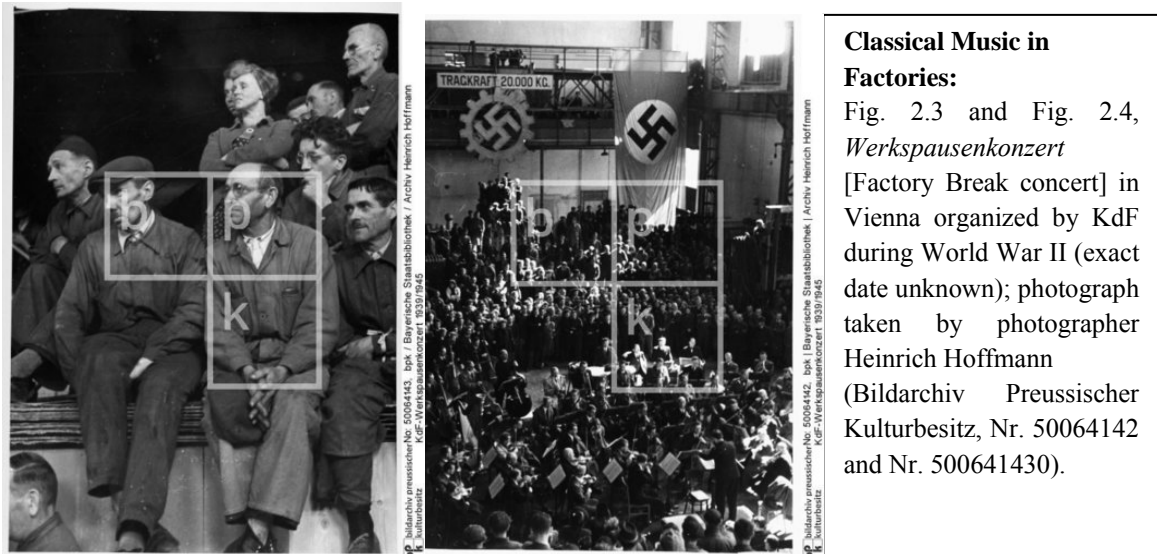
<sup>258</sup> "Aus den Betrieben," *Sopade*, Dec. 3, 1581.

in the form of extra work and less free (lunch) time. One can clearly see a certain dogmatism on the part of KdF: its commitment to joy production sometimes led to its losing sight of its audience and the latter's needs.

The two pictures below, taken at a KdF-*Werkpausenkonzert* [Factory Break Concert] in Vienna sometime between 1939 and 1945<sup>259</sup> by the photographer Heinrich Hoffmann illustrate these points. First, it is clear that concerts like this one, performed in the production hall, brought work to a standstill in the factory, something that could be very disadvantageous for the workers, since they might be forced to make up for the shortfall through extra work time later. Second, the picture hardly displays an audience of enthusiastic workers: mouths droops, suggesting annoyance and dissatisfaction. Of course, this might be an exaggerated reading of the zone out expression musical audiences often have. At the same time, however, this audience is not making an ostentatious effort to appear enthusiastic at an official event in the Third Reich. We also have to consider here that we are looking at official pictures. On the one hand that means that we might already see the “most enthusiastic” expressions here, assuming there a selection of most “regime-supporting” evidence took place. At the same time, this public and official context also means that discontent workers were not in a position to clearly show their discontent with more ostentatious expressions of disagreements.

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<sup>259</sup> The exact date is unknown.



### Classical Music in Factories:

Fig. 2.3 and Fig. 2.4, *Werkspausenkonzert* [Factory Break concert] in Vienna organized by KdF during World War II (exact date unknown); photograph taken by photographer Heinrich Hoffmann (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Nr. 50064142 and Nr. 500641430).

To this point I have been discussing KdF events for workers in terms of KdF, on the one hand, and its audience, the workers, on the other hand and some external views of this relationship. Overall KdF was positively received by workers, and also received as comparatively un-Nazi in its activities. However, audiences did not react uniformly positively to KdF; there were also recurring instances of workers discontent with forced participation in KdF's events. This issue of coercion – a coercion not in line with KdF's general principle of voluntary participation – introduce also a different complexity, that of the position of the KdF *Betriebswart* [factory attendant,] who worked on the behalf on KdF's behalf, but were also workers themselves.<sup>260</sup> Reports mention that these factory attendants sometimes made workers buy KdF tickets for cultural events, even though they had no plans to visit them. The opposite of this also occurred: at some instances, these attendants denied workers (purchase of) tickets for events they were interested in; this was often grounded in clientelism on the part of KdF attendant.<sup>261</sup>

<sup>260</sup> However, at least according to some reports, these workers would often act in more supervisory positions.

<sup>261</sup> This is described in a report by *Neu Beginnen* about KdF at Osram in the summer of 1934. Female workers at Osram, being paid a very low piece wage, were “very indignant that they very often [had] to buy tickets for [KdF] events.” The report mentions “much scolding” about this, and that for one event, four women of the workshop

Overall, these KdF attendants *KdF-Warte*, were in a curious middle-position between their colleagues and, indeed, ultimately, the Nazi government. Holding an office for the leisure organization thus conferred a certain degree of power on them. It is more than imaginable that some of them would come to abuse this newly gained authority. In most cases, this latter group would probably also be the one to coerce workers to be unwanted tickets. However, the attendants could also find themselves in a rather disadvantageous position. It was their task to distribute tickets for KdF's cultural events. In Berlin in 1934, female workers in charge of selling KdF tickets complained that they had to pay for those tickets they were not able to find buyers for. Enraged about this, many of the women, – renaming KdF “*Kraft durch Ärger*” [“Strength through Trouble”] – refused to sell tickets and, in particular, to pay for them. According to the report, this led to a limitation of the sale, i.e. an accommodation to the women on the part of KdF.<sup>262</sup>

These two reports point toward the ambiguous positions of those who functioned as KdF representatives at German factories. Their situation was not necessarily made easier by the KdF's permanent emphasis its events being “voluntary” in character. Supposedly, there was no obligation to take part in KdF, but the representatives were nevertheless under the pressure to win over as many workers of their company as possible. They therefore ignored KdF's general principle of “voluntariness,” and instead employed peer pressure and other “soft” disciplinary measures. The position of the *KdF-Warte* is interesting in itself and also serves to deepen the complexity involved when talking of KdF's reception. It is not surprising that the impact of KdF activities

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refused to purchase a ticket. A few days before, KdF had released reduced opera tickets for Osram workers. However, Osram's KdF attendants, according to the report, did not make these tickets available to the regular workers, but instead kept them for themselves and their friends. (*Neu Beginnen*, 189; report for Jun./Jul. 1934.)

<sup>262</sup> *Neu Beginnen*, 143; report for May 1934.

should be changed, enhanced or distorted from factory to factory. The role of the factory attendant bears this out.

I would now like to return, however, to my more global discussion of KdF's reception and conclude it by looking at the reaction to KdF's activities that can be found in Communist leaflets. Unsurprisingly, the Communist reception of KdF was a critical one. We can see this in a leaflet that was distributed in 1934 in Erfurt:

With bourgeois [*spiessbürgerlich*] enlightenment-rubbish [*Aufklärungskehricht*,] with military music, with festivals and ceremonies in new blue German-Labor-Front-uniforms, *Kraft durch Freude* is supposed to distract you from the monstrous cheating of the people by the Nazis in the service of capitalist exploiters. [Alexander Sperk and Hermann-Josef Rupieper, *Regierungsbezirk Erfurt: Die Lageberichte der Geheimen Staatspolizei zur Provinz Sachsen 1933 bis 1936*, vol. Bd. 3 (Halle (Saale): Mitteldt. Verl., 2006), 144. (= "Lagebericht der Staatspolizeistelle Erfurt für März 1934," Mar. 9, 1934.)]

The KdF was considered important – or popular – enough to be featured so prominently on a Communist leaflet. And the one cited was not the only one. The Baden Gestapo reported in 1935 that it had found leaflets in Heidelberg and its vicinity, which also criticized the Nazi leisure organization: according to this leaflet, the workers would get from the Nazi regime, through KdF, "only the breadcrumbs falling off the table."<sup>263</sup>

KdF's prominence in Communist leaflets can be interpreted in two different ways. It could speak to the fact that the workers were indeed dissatisfied with the leisure organization, and that the Communists picked up on this frustration and highlighted it in their political fight against the Nazi regime. Alternatively, the very opposite might be the case: the Communists themselves might have been frustrated by the popularity of KdF and the "success" of the propaganda surrounding it; in their own political work, they thus

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<sup>263</sup> Jörg Schadt, *Verfolgung und Widerstand unter dem Nationalsozialismus in Baden* die Lageberichte der Gestapo und des Generalstaatsanwalts Karlsruhe, 1933 - 1940, 3 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1976), 3. (= Lagebericht des Geheimen Staatspolizeiamts Karlsruhe für die Zeit vom 1.-30. November 1935.)

focused on educating German workers about their assumed misconception when enjoying KdF and its activities. Both these possibilities, however, make sense only if KdF was an important part of everyday life in Germany.

So, how can we summarize how various groups and individuals, both from within the regime and coming with an oppositional stance from outside it, received and reacted to KdF's "cultural" activities, in German companies and beyond – and what can we learn from this? I have shown that there were feelings of discontent and annoyances about the leisure organization, its events and its repercussions – such as extra-work or lack of lunch breaks. However, there is also much evidence pointing to the popularity of KdF events. In this context, it is especially the testimonies of the "ordinary Germans" looked at above which allow us insights – if rather patchily – into what this "popularity" meant, and how it positively shaped people's expectations of their everyday lives during the Third Reich. Helmut R., for example, fondly remembered his frequent visits to the theater, and Krupp worker Hermann B. testified to the great frequency of his attendance at theatrical performances; from Ida T.'s diary we even learned about her sublime experience in the theater. Briefly put, the Nazi organization KdF seems to have augmented workers' overall quality of life.

Through its popular events, KdF was able to realize its goal of helping to create a unified *Volksgemeinschaft* at least partially. Correspondents from both socialist groups and Nazi agencies also indicate that KdF's cultural events quite often facilitated "community-building" amongst workers (and, at times, also their management). The events also seemingly helped to mitigate workers' animosity or opposition toward the Nazi regime and its ideological framework. This, however, does not mean that KdF



events functioned as direct harbingers of National Socialist ideology, or that they were even conceptualized as such. Conversely, I would rather suggest that KdF could be so effective because it displayed a certain distance from directly disseminating political and ideological content. This disconnectedness of leisure activities from Nazi ideas and the Nazi state, at least in the eyes of many witnesses of and participants in KdF events can be very clearly found in the testimony of the Social Democratic worker Ernst B., who was surprised to be greeted with “*Heil Hitler*” at a KdF event. A similar separation of KdF from the Nazi state was also present in the analysis of KdF’s cultural activities at Osram, Borsig, Schering and Krupp. Possibly partly due to the companies’ desires to remain “independent,” there was a conspicuous lack of KdF in their companies;<sup>264</sup> in other words, KdF’s function as the organizational framework for leisure for German workers was often de-emphasized, so the organization was partly barred from its own events and so prevented anyway from direct, immediate dissemination of Nazi politics. Furthermore, nowhere in the sources could I find clear evidence that KdF’s “cultural” events and activities directly translated into a direct pushing of Nazi ideological ideas or politics anyway. Both were generally absent from the events in question, and this was probably on purpose. Oppositional or socialist reports on KdF’s reception do sometimes mention Nazi ideology and politics, but typically emphasize that workers merely “lived with” such political/ideological contents rather than being convinced in any way.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that this non-appearance of KdF in company’s text does not necessarily mean that KdF was not “there.” In fact, it is imaginable that it might have been present in a very practical manner, at least more than admitted in company texts – the ostensive omission of KdF’s role could be due to certain motivations on the part of the companies, rather than a reflection of actual facts.

<sup>265</sup> Of course, such positions as presented in *Sopade* and *Neu Beginnen* reports have to be taken with a grain of salt. These reports, from leftist activist to their fellow oppositional fighters, were driven by desires to ‘motivate’ and spur the fight against Nazi Germany. Thus, they would have emphasized (and probably over-emphasized) the non-involvement of workers with the Nazi regime and its ideas.

Despite the slightly paradoxical absence of KdF as a direct organizer of leisure events, its goal of “joy production” was not absent. As shown, there were several (cultural) leisure options for workers that were in line with KdF’s overall ambitions, allowing the eventual facilitation of both goals, “producing joy” and helping the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Leisure activities and cultural events appear to have become an integral part of workers’ experiences on the shop floor during the Third Reich. So in fact did KdF, I would argue, even if it was not always in the foreground or not admitted as the ‘primary mover’ in companies. Some shop floors were, at least partially and for some hours of the workers’ days, transformed into spaces of leisure, or, as my title’s chapter posits, into “fun factories. My title has a question mark, however, as dubbing these “Nazi fun factories,” might be slightly misleading: I have argued in this chapter that KdF’s events for workers did not seem to have led to a “nazification” of German workers. However, even if KdF events did not turn industrial workers into Nazis, they certainly had regime-stabilizing effects for Nazi Germany. First, as already concluded above, they furthered community-building, thereby helping with the creation of the Nazi-envisioned unified, conflict-free *Volksgemeinschaft*; a harmonization intended to strengthen and stabilize the Nazi regime. Secondly, KdF events allowed workers to have a good time, thereby probably relieving their hardships, even if only temporarily.<sup>266</sup> KdF’s functioning as a “joy producer” was thus regime-stabilizing. In other words, I believe that

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<sup>266</sup> Of course, my chapter has also uncovered cases of discontent with KdF events. Such discontent would probably not have translated into attitudes eventually stabilizing the regime. However, it is conversely imaginable that this discontent did (‘at least,’ from a Nazi perspective) not lead to more opposition to the regime, precisely because of the previously described “disconnectedness” between KdF events and the regime. That is, KdF’s disconnectedness from the regime might simultaneously have made its events more popular and also buffered the regime from any negative

is it not too farfetched to argue that at least some German workers considered KdF to be a positive presence in their daily routines, something that led to a perceived increase of their quality of life. In this manner, KdF might have been a reason for them to reduce their oppositional and negative attitude towards the Third Reich – if they had those to begin with. This effect was probably even stronger since KdF could be considered as an (already realized) element of a larger promise for a better future.<sup>267</sup> In this way, KdF came to function as *pars pro toto* for the (future successes of the) Nazi regime overall; positive occurrences in the sphere of social policy, and the sphere of leisure realized through KdF in particular, were “proof” that the Nazi movement was already fulfilling parts of its promises and thus could be believed to bring about even greater (positive) effects for the German population in the future.

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reactions to KdF. In other words, I think it is arguable that KdF was probably nobody’s prime reason for being opposed to the regime.

<sup>267</sup> Here, I am building on an argument by Ulrich Herbert and Norbert Frei; see Ulrich Herbert, *Arbeit, Volkstum, Weltanschauung: Über Fremde und Deutsche im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1995), 95f.; Norbert Frei, *1945 und Wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), 122f.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Shop Floor as Gym for the *Volksgemeinschaft*: KdF Sports for the German Working Class

Edith T., born in 1921 and employed at the Thyssen company in the Ruhr area from 1940 to 1945, had fond memories of her Third Reich sports activities, which happened at her work place. An active athlete since the age of nine, she joined Thyssen's *Betriebssportgemeinschaft* [Factory Sports Community] when working for this company. In an interview from 1982, she remembered this period as a “good time,” mainly referring to her sporting activities. In 1943, she passed the *Reichsportabzeichen*,<sup>268</sup> and became a DAF sports attendant at Thyssen a year later. In the interview, she showed her Factory Sports “passport” from that time, and recited its inscription, a quotation by KdF-head Robert Ley: “It is not our goal to raise matadors. We only want healthy and happy men and women [*Menschen*] in our factories, because a healthy people is 90 of 100 [per cent] the solution to the overall social question.”<sup>269</sup>

KdF's work in the realm of sports was driven by two main goals: “producing everyday joy” for the German population and helping to create a unified and strong German “*Volksgemeinschaft*.” Building the latter included both the goal of incorporating the working class into this envisioned community, and a particular interest in physicality and efforts to improve Germans' bodily strength through sports and exercise. KdF's work

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<sup>268</sup> The *Reichssportabzeichen* was an honorary badge that could be gained for having successfully performed a requisite amount of specified exercises within one year; see also chapter one for further discussion.

<sup>269</sup> Archiv “Dt. Gedächtnis”, interview with Edith T. from July 1982.

in German factories, organizing sports for workers, especially through “Factory Sport Communities,” helped realize both these *Volksgemeinschaft*-related agendas – as well as the “production of joy.” At the same time, KdF (willingly or unconsciously) opened up spaces for oppositional minded individuals and groups<sup>270</sup> in the areas of sports,— something that, paradoxically, eventually strengthened the Third Reich.

The context, content and motivation of KdF’s sports initiatives for workers in factories will be explored in this chapter, based in part on brief studies of the German companies, this time Osram, Krupp, Borsig *and* Schering and now in regards to company sports. I will demonstrate how KdF was intended to function beyond the sphere of sports and leisure as a tool for the Nazi regime’s reaching – and, in an envisioned later step, policing of – the working class. There were ongoing tensions between KdF and the companies, in whose internal affairs the regime began to meddle via KdF sports activities; just like we saw with KdF’s cultural activities for workers. KdF’s attempts to reach both the everyday lives of workers and into the internal affairs of individual companies was, to an extent, successful. This was despite – or maybe even because of – the fact that KdF’s actual involvement in Factory Sports remained rather limited: often, the leisure organization merely appropriated existing sports infrastructures of companies, which then often continued almost unaltered after the KdF “takeover.” However, such developments were acceptable to KdF, as long as its general aims, the building of community and “joy production” were achieved or at least sought after.

KdF’s somewhat limited involvement in Factory Sports Communities actually

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<sup>270</sup> Here, I build on Alf Lüdtke’s *Alltagsgeschichte*-concept of “*Eigensinn*”. Alf Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 313; Andrew Stuart Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim* (Bloomington [u.a.]: Indiana Univ. Press, 2004), 262. See also page 169.

enabled the latter to become spaces for potentially Nazi-distant or even oppositional workers – spaces where they could do their sports amongst themselves, without much interference from KdF/the state.<sup>271</sup> KdF sports groups and classes not directly related to companies make this apparent. Not much active (political) resistance work was done within these spaces – the activities here were (mostly) limited to sports and endeavors to maintain the oppositional groups to begin with. In that way, these KdF spaces turned into sites for oppositional groups that did not actually threaten the regime. Rather, these spaces maybe even strengthened the Third Reich, because they eventually functioned as a form of distraction.<sup>272</sup>

What is at stake here is the “continuity” of previously established working-class sports into and throughout the Third Reich. Should KdF’s sports classes and Factory Sports Communities be considered as a “haven” for worker-athletes – one that perhaps allowed for potentially resistant acts, but at least enabled them to continue their activities which had previously occurred in socio-cultural (sports) milieus generally destroyed by the Nazis? Or, conversely, do we have to consider KdF’s sports offerings, especially in Factory Sports Communities, as the last stage of this very development, since it is the

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<sup>271</sup> This mirrors what I have described in chapter two for social evenings, which some workers saw as very good opportunities to bond with former (Communist or Social-Democratic) comrades – relatively unbothered by the regime, but “supported” through KdF’s infrastructure (and its sponsored beer.) As mentioned in the previous footnote, these (oppositional) workers could be said to be acting in an *eigensinnig* manner in this scenario.

<sup>272</sup> Thus, to an extent, this chapter will in fact confirm Mason’s argument about KdF having functioned as a “distraction.” [See Timothy W Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1978), 185 f. On this, see also Wolfgang Zollitsch, *Arbeiter zwischen Weltwirtschaftskrise und Nationalsozialismus: Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte der Jahre 1928 bis 1936*, 88 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 135. ] However, I believe that this distracting worked in fact in slightly different ways than to those described by Mason. It was a more indirect process – participants did not simply give in and chose KdF to be distracted (and this was also not fostered by KdF.) Rather on the initiative of oppositional individuals and groups who opted to choose KdF as their spaces – an development that then, in turn, led to a process that could be coined “distraction” (since, as discussed above, the spaces could not develop into full-fledged spaces of resistance.

reason that worker-athletes now did sports in a possibly apolitical, and certainly Nazi-controlled and thus non-socialist, environment? In other words, did KdF lead to the end of working-class sports as they were known before 1933?<sup>273</sup>

KdF sports in factories, and especially its “Sports Musters” are usually characterized as highly militarized and having the single-minded goal of war preparation. This diagnosis is incorrect. Instead, KdF sports in factories was, like all of the Nazi leisure organization’s work, fully committed to providing fun, entertainment and relaxation – and thus was by no means an exception to KdF’s overall project of “joy production.”

Nazism was obsessed with strong and healthy German bodies – both with male ones, which would be “used” as soldiers, and with female ones, which were to “function” as mothers for many German children.<sup>274</sup> Frequent and intense physical exercise, as

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<sup>273</sup> The issues described in this paragraph are themselves of course part of an even larger historiographical debate, which deals with the question of resistance in Third Reich, especially that of workers. For a summary of this debate (until the 1980s, see Ulrich Herbert, “Arbeiterschaft im ‘Dritten Reich’. Zwischenbilanz und offene Fragen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 320-360. For an intervention in this debate that fits in with the general lines of argumentation put forth in this dissertation, see Alf Lüdtke, “What Happened to the ‘Fiery Red Glow’? Workers’ Experiences and German Fascism,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 198-251. Important to note for this overall debate is also Martin Broszat’s term of “*Resistenz*,” according to which Germans did not resist Nazis, but still managed to evade Nazi control in areas of their (private) lives; cf. Martin Broszat, *Bayern in der NS-Zeit: Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevölkerung im Spiegel vertraulicher Berichte* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1977).

<sup>274</sup> For a brief discussion of sports politics and the organizations involved in offering sports during the Third Reich, see Thomas Alkemeyer, *Körper, Kult und Politik: Von der “Muskelreligion” Pierre de Coubertins zur Inszenierung von Macht in den Olympischen Spielen von 1936* (Frankfurt/Main; New York: Campus, 1996), 276f.; on Nazi sports politics, also see Hajo Bernett, *Sportpolitik im Dritten Reich aus den Akten der Reichskanzlei* (Schorndorf bei Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1971). Arnd Krüger offers a brief overview of the discussions within the Nazi regime about how to ‘synchronize’ the sector of sports in 1933; he argues that the Nazis eventually came to embrace the Italian model for the sphere of sports (as they did, to an extent, for the sphere of leisure): Arnd Krüger, “‘Heute gehört uns Deutschland und morgen...?’ Das Ringen um den Sinn der Gleichschaltung im Sport in der ersten Jahreshälfte 1933,” in *Sportgeschichte: Traditionspflege und Wertewandel*, ed. Wolfgang Buss and Arnd Krüger (Duderstadt: Mecke Druck und Verlag, 1985), 175-196. On sports and physical exercise in the Third Reich, see Hajo Bernett, *Nationalsozialistische Leibeserziehung* (Schorndorf b. Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1966). and Wilhelm Joch, “Sport Und Leibeserziehung Im Dritten Reich,” in *Geschichte Der Leibesübungen*, ed. Horst Ueberhorst,

offered by KdF, was intended to perfect the German *Volkskörper*. The leisure organization was very eager to improve through sports the health and strength of individual Germans, considering this to be the ideal means to achieve “recovery, fortification, the breeding of our race, a deeply-stalwart [*urkräftig*] German *Volk*,”<sup>275</sup> for KdF “sports and games were of decisive importance ... for the day-by-day struggle for existence and the productive capacity of a nation.”<sup>276</sup> Given this strong belief in the utility of physical exercise, it is not surprising that sports also played a major role in the organization’s activities in German factories. After all, it was the German workers’ physical strength that the regime relied on most for Germany’s economic output. Healthier and stronger workers would be more productive, and thus benefit the German state and its Nazi government. Additionally, KdF was convinced that sports would not only directly advance the workers’ physical strength and fitness, but would also, in the long term, improve their overall outlook on life (and work) – making them happier – which in turn would increase their productivity even further. KdF was interested in “joy production,” especially for German workers, whose support for the regime they sought to create and enlarge; sports were to play a major part in this.

In addition, however, there was a more immediate practical political motivation for KdF’s initial engagement in the organization of sports for German workers in their

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vol. 3/2 (Berlin/Munich/Frankfurt: Bartels & Wernitz, 1981), 701-742. and Winfried Joch, *Politische Leibeserziehung und ihre Theorie im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, 1976. A more general overview can be found in Michael Krüger, *Leibesübungen im 20. Jahrhundert. Sport für alle*, 10 (Schorndorf: Hofmann, 2005).

<sup>275</sup> Bruno Malitz, *Die Leibesübungen in der nationalsozialistischen Idee* (Munich: Eher, 1933), 50.

<sup>276</sup> Paul Stemmer, “The Organization of Leisure Time of German Workers through the National-Socialist Fellowship *Kraft durch Freude*,” in *World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation, German addresses for Committee[s] I-XI, Rome 1938*, 5. [Published in English.]



factories. It appears that KdF aimed at destroying – or at least muting the political opposition that might be expected to come from – the milieus of working class athletes. In Germany, workers' sports clubs had been important sites for the working class movement since the nineteenth century. Founded as a counterpart to late Imperial Germany's nationalistically-orientated bourgeois gymnastic associations, which often barred workers from membership, these German workers' sports clubs became a crucial part of both the Communist and Social Democratic milieus in Germany.<sup>277</sup> After the Nazis took over power in 1933, they quickly dissolved all German workers' sports associations – such as the *Arbeiter-Turn- und Sportbund* [Workers' Gymnastics and Sports Federation, ATSB for short] or the *Kampfsgemeinschaft für Rote Sporteinheit* [Fighting Community for Red Sport Unity, *Rotsport*, or Red Sport for short] as well as individual workers' sports clubs; these dissolutions were part of their attack against Germany's socialist parties.<sup>278</sup> Leading functionaries in workers' sports associations

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<sup>277</sup> For an illustrated history of working class sports in Germany, see Hans Teichler, *Illustrierte Geschichte des Arbeitersports* (Berlin: J.H.W. Dietz, 1987). For a shorter summary, also including many illustrations, see Arnd Krüger, "The German Way of Workers Sport," in *The Story of Worker Sport*, ed. Arnd Krüger and James Riordan (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1996), 1-26. For an extensive bibliography on the historiography of working class sports in Germany, see Eike Stiller, *Literatur zur Geschichte des Arbeitersports in Deutschland von 1892 bis 2005: Eine Bibliographie* (Berlin: trafo, 2006). an older survey is Hans Teichler, "Literaturübersicht zum Arbeitersport," in *90 Jahre Arbeitersport*, ed. Franz Nitsch, Jürgen Fischer, and Klaus Stock (Münster: Lit-Verl., 1985), 143-150.

See also Bodo-Michael Baumunck, "'Grätsche seit- und Rolle rückwärts': Arbeitersport," in *Die Arbeiter: Lebensformen, Alltag und Kultur von der Frühindustrialisierung bis zum "Wirtschaftswunder"*, ed. Wolfgang Ruppert (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1986), 325-334.

<sup>278</sup> By June 27, the ATSB and other national worker sports associations were either dissolved or voluntarily disbanded. (See Krüger, "The German Way of Workers Sport," 18.). However, beginning in Spring 1933, the date of the destruction of the German workers' sports movement varied regionally. See Jörg Lölke, "'Wir sind nicht sang- und klanglos untergegangen!': Der Turn-, Sport- und Musikverein 'Glaswerk' als Sammelpunkt Jenaer Arbeitersportler in der NS-Zeit.," *Sozial- und Zeitgeschichte des Sportes* 8, no. 2 (1994): 36. Lölke's article also demonstrates that despite the official ban, some workers' sports clubs managed, sometimes secretly, to continue with their sporting activities. Lölke presents the case of a club in Jena, which was not dissolved and persisted throughout the Third Reich. Leaders of the club were forced to join the Nazi party, however, and it seems that it also ceased to function as a politically leftist club – but it also seems to have been devoid of National Socialist content. There are a few local

were persecuted and sent to concentration camps or murdered. This move by the Nazis, as a part of their *Gleichschaltung* policy, considerably weakened their Social Democratic and Communist opponents as well as the socialist milieus in Germany overall. However, it also opened a potentially dangerous void. Where would all of these former worker-athletes go? What would they do in their free time? The Nazis were eager to fill this newly opened gap with their own sports offerings, seeking to reach workers and win them over. Acting, through KdF, as the sponsor of sports activities was thus one way for Nazis to block free time as a space for potential anti-Nazi activity and simultaneously to gain access to the private lives of German workers. To make sure to reach as many workers as possible – and to avoid sporting activities becoming underground practices – KdF attempted to directly link workers’ private lives to their professional sphere. This meant that from 1936 on, following a decree by the Sports Department’s head Hans von Tschammer und Osten, it expanded its sports activities into the actual factories, aggressively promoting the founding of Factory Sports Communities. Generally, the companies were expected to finance these communities, while KdF would staff them with instructors. KdF’s initializing of these sporting communities can thus be seen as a deliberate attempt to “win over” workers. How successful was this and how much it did

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histories about the workers’ sports movement and its fate during the Third Reich. An account of the destruction of workers’ sports associations in rural Württemberg is provided by Klaus Schönberger (in Klaus Schönberger, “Die Arbeitersportbewegung in Württembergischen Landgemeinden und ihre Zerschlagung 1933,” in *Arbeiterkultur und Arbeitersport*, ed. Hans Joachim Teichler (Clausthal-Zellerfeld: DVS, 1985), 168-182.) For the situation in Bremen, see Klaus Achilles, “Die Zerschlagung der Arbeitersportbewegung in Bremen,” in *Arbeiterkultur und Arbeitersport*, ed. Hans Joachim Teichler (Clausthal-Zellerfeld: DVS, 1985), 183-195. For Hesse, see Horst Giesler, *Arbeitersportler, schlägt Hitler! Das Ende der Arbeitersportbewegung im Volksstaat Hessen: Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Sportgeschichte Hessens* (Münster: Lit, 1995). For the history of the destruction of the nationwide Communist and Social Democratic workers’ sports associations, *Rotsport* and ATSB, see primarily Hajo Bernett, “Die Zerschlagung des deutschen Arbeitersports durch die nationalsozialistische Revolution,” *Sportwissenschaft* 4 (1983): 349-373. and also Hans Joachim Teichler, “Aktuelle Aspekte zur Geschichte der Arbeitersportbewegung in Deutschland,” *Stadion* 34, no. 1 (2008): 43-60.

lead to the destruction of workers' sports milieus?

KdF did not present the purpose of sports in this way, of course, and rather celebrated this initiative to bring sports offerings into German industrial companies as one of its transformative innovations. In a speech before an assembly of 10,000 workers at the AEG factory in Berlin, Reich Sports Leader Hans von Tschammer und Osten explained how KdF's takeover of company sports meant an improvement of the earlier situation, when sports were organized by the companies on an individual basis. In that previous arrangement, he argued, the number of participating workers had remained small. Only with KdF's comprehensive approach, and its "basic schooling," claimed von Tschammer und Osten, could a true community of sports be achieved.<sup>279</sup> He summarized KdF's goals with sports in factories as follows: "advancement of national health, increase of viable working age and of productivity, furtherance of the Factory Community and promotion of able-bodied young sporting athletes."<sup>280</sup> And Robert Ley, the head of the KdF, added:

We do not want to breed matadors and "cannons," but we want the entire workforce to eventually accomplish top performances. The first top performance will be when every last "people's comrade" in the factory does sports on a daily basis. Factory sports are community sports and that's the way more and more community is created. Everybody will take part here, from the plant manager to the apprentice boy, doing all kinds of sports. [Robert Ley, quoted after Wilhelm Schnauk, "Betriebssport in der Betriebsgemeinschaft," *Arbeitertum*, Jul. 15, 1937, 7.]

In accordance with KdF's general ambitions, its main motives for promoting company sports were the building of community and the enhancing of performance through the strengthening of the workers' bodies. In addition to all this, a desire for more control over

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<sup>279</sup> See Wilhelm Schnauk, "Betriebssport in der Betriebsgemeinschaft," *Arbeitertum*, Jul. 15, 1937, 7.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 6.

workers drove KdF's urge to take over company sports: Arranging workers' sports within the factory setting proved to be an ideal way to enter both the physical and organizational interior of companies and the private lives of workers.

Again, and unsurprisingly, no leading KdF politician openly admitted to such a coercive motivation. Instead, the Reich Sports Leader von Tschammer und Osten made sure to point out the voluntary character of KdF's company sports offerings<sup>281</sup> – an aspect that would be in line with KdF's general principles as discussed in chapter one. Indeed, the December 1936 decree that put KdF in charge of “Physical Exercises within the Factory Community” emphasized this “voluntariness” repeatedly. This referred to both workers and companies. The latter had the choice to either make their company sports club part of KdF or transform them into private clubs (a transformation, however, which required a change of names to eliminate all references to the company from which the club originated).<sup>282</sup> For the companies' workers, “athletic activity within the factory community is voluntary.” With this, KdF mainly meant to address those workers already practicing sports in other organizations outside their companies. These individuals, according to the decree, were not to be “either openly or covertly forced to cease their sports activities in these organizations.” Such leniency might seem surprising given our preconceptions of the Nazis and KdF's eagerness to “win over” German workers. But we have already seen KdF's less direct ways of involving itself in factories in chapter one.

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<sup>281</sup> See Wilhelm Schnauk, “Betriebssport in der Betriebsgemeinschaft,” *Arbeitertum*, Jul. 15, 1937, 7.

<sup>282</sup> BArch, R 36/ 2090; implementing rules of the “Verordnung des Reichssportführers von Tschammer und Osten über die zukünftigen Aufgaben des Sportamtes der N.S.-Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude’.” A 1938 text entitled “Factory sports as social task” by Franz Mende, the head of DAF's Social Department, stated that when presented with this option, “with a few exceptions, the former company sports clubs [...] incorporated themselves into the newly built [KdF] Factory Sports Communities. (See BArch, R 36/ 2090; Franz Mende, “Betriebssport als soziale Aufgabe.”)

And it appears that the regime's desire to motivate as many German citizens as possible to do sports – and their belief in their principle of voluntary participation – was stronger than its desire to have them all incorporated into Nazi organizations. In the decree, this was expressed as follows: “The task of Factory Sports is not the redirection of those people's comrades who are already exercising, but the gathering of others who have so far kept their distance from physical exercise.”<sup>283</sup> This statement suggests that it was not KdF's prime goal to destroy already existing sports associations, but rather to reach those currently “idle” or in abeyance. We can see here the importance that Nazis attributed to physical health and strength, but in the character of sports for all.

KdF's insistence on the voluntary character of its sports in the factories points to the fact that joy and happiness were the main objectives behind its offerings. KdF's leader recognized that this could not be achieved through force or any form of pressure. Both Ley and von Tschammer und Osten restated this emphasis on joy in speeches they gave on the occasion of launching a campaign for the building of more sports fields and exercise facilities in and by German companies. Here, Ley described KdF as an “institution, which is capable of bringing some happiness into the grim existence of the working people, in particular to those who have to work day after day in factories and

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<sup>283</sup> BArch, R 36/ 2090, “Durchführungsbestimmungen” for the “Verordnung des Reichssportführers von Tschammer und Osten über die zukünftigen Aufgaben des Sportamtes der N.S-Gemeinschaft ,Kraft durch Freude.” In an addendum to his decree, von Tschammer und Osten reiterated the emphasis on voluntariness. The introduction of Factory Sports Communities, he argued, was intended to give sports the widest possible basis. He stressed “that this wide basis can only be achieved through voluntary commitment and through taking pleasure in physical exercise” and went on to state: “I thus expect [sic!] that the [new] provisions will not restrict the basic principle of voluntary participation.” Ley too, while expressing his hope that the former company sports clubs would join KdF, also underlined that these were the clubs' decisions alone and that “[u]nder no circumstances should pressure be exerted.” (“Der Reichssportführer zur Umgliederung der Firmensportvereine. Ergänzung zur Durchführungsbestimmung, Absatz 2. Der Verordnung vom 16. 12. 1936.”) [Von Tschammer und Osten's word choice (“*ich erwarte*”; “I anticipate”) is curious as it suggests a certain powerlessness on his part in this terrain.]

who are not blessed with the goods of fortune, money and property.”<sup>284</sup> Its involvement in factory sports, Ley argued, would allow KdF to continue and extend such work. Von Tschammer und Osten addressed even more directly the aim of “joy production” that motivated the campaign for more factory sports facilities. He demanded the building of more sports grounds, which he wanted to be “places of happiness and of the joyful cavorting” [*Stätten des Frohsinns und der Tummelfreude.*]” The close, causal connection between factory sports and “joy production” was clear.

It is important to note that KdF often promulgated its emphasis on “joy production” in a very sober manner. We can also see that its attempt to achieve this, in terms of organization, can be characterized as very disciplined, planned and calculated. Sometimes, then, KdF’s efforts resemble an actual military campaign, a sort of “warfare for joy.” The beginning of von Tschammer und Osten’s speech illustrates this well: After proudly announcing that already more than 500 companies had set up factory sports communities, he continues using highly militaristic language, claiming that “the idea of Factory Sports marches on:”

The attack on the masses of the non-engaged is in full flow. We have already captured many for the sake of the health and the strength of the people, for the idea of an athletic factory community and not least for happiness. Still more captives will follow. [BArch R 36/ 2090; speech by v. Tschammer und Osten, in “Schafft Betriebssportanlagen,” 9.]

These words depict KdF’s Sports Department resolutely “fighting” for its overall goal of creating a “*Volk in Leibesübungen*” [a German people united in physical exercise,] and

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<sup>284</sup> Claiming to have received strong international recognition for the work his leisure organization had done in the past four years of its existence, Ley continued boastfully: “We have shown to the world, how one can make people happy, using completely new ways and following unique revolutionary thoughts.” (BArch R 36/ 2090; speech by Robert Ley, in “Schafft Betriebssportanlagen: Keine Luxus- sondern Zweckbauten. Keine Stadien, sondern Übungsplätze” [Establish Factory Sports Establishments: No luxury, but functional buildings. No stadiums, but sports grounds”].)

thus also ‘producing’ joyful, healthy and strong Germans. For KdF’s leaders, this was a genuine goal of Nazi policy, and so they had no qualms about connecting it to other aims of the regime, which were much more directly embedded in the context of war.<sup>285</sup>

Rhetoric like this has led many historians to the assessment that the Nazis’ engagement in the arena of sports was in fact mostly targeted towards preparing the German population physically for an upcoming war.<sup>286</sup> With the hindsight knowledge that the war took place, such an analysis sounds compelling. And there was, of course, an underlying discourse of war, violence, and the preparation of soldiers inherent to KdF sports (and indeed KdF overall.) However, there is a difference between an underlying aim and a directly expressed, consciously followed, goal. KdF factory sports genuinely was driven by a general emphasis on “happiness” rather than performance. It would be wrong to reduce the leisure organization’s work, especially in the field of sports, merely to the status of war preparation.

Before discussing KdF’s “joy production” in the arena of company sports, and how this might have led to a destruction of working class sports milieus, let me first address the conflicted relationship between KdF and companies’ managements in the particular arena of sports. My findings in the following correspond with Sebastian Fasbender’s work on company sports in the heavy industries in the West German Ruhr

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<sup>285</sup> In this context, the *Reichssportsführer* also alludes in his speech to the Nazi idea of “living space,” even connecting his own efforts in the realm of factory sports to this more global project. Arguing that the German people are a “people without space” [*Volk ohne Raum*], he contends, “[f]or precisely this reason we have the boundless will, to wrest from this narrow space the site for physical exercises, for the sake of a happy future and a true racial community.” (BArch R 36/ 2090; speech by von Tschammer und Osten, in „Schafft Betriebssportanlagen,” 10.)

<sup>286</sup> See, for example, Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1992), 261–262.

area from 1921 to 1938.<sup>287</sup> Fasbender shows that companies in the Ruhr were not at all happy about Nazi intrusions into their companies via sports and that there was a resistive attempt to remain independent in this area.

A desire to maintain autonomy from KdF can be found at the Krupp company; this was also visible when it comes to factory sports. Krupp's sports club, the *Kruppsche Turngemeinde* [Krupp's Gymnastical Community, KTG for short] was established in 1910.<sup>288</sup> There appears to have been KdF-promoted "Factory Sports" at Krupp since at least 1937; in July of this year, a local newspaper in Essen, where the Krupp Company was located, reported a ceremony for the inauguration of sports facilities for Krupp's workers.<sup>289</sup> Neither KdF nor DAF is mentioned in the article; however, the use of terms such as *Betriebssportwart* [Factory Sports Attendant; usually the title for a DAF/KdF representative in the area of sports in a factory] still strongly suggests their involvement.<sup>290</sup> I would suggest that omitting reference to KdF was either Krupp's

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<sup>287</sup> Sebastian Fasbender, "Zwischen Arbeitersport und Arbeitssport" (Cuvillier, 1997).

<sup>288</sup> Cf. Siegfried Gehrmann, *Fussball, Vereine, Politik: Zur Sportgeschichte des Reviers, 1900-1940* (Essen: R. Hobbing, 1988), 191.

<sup>289</sup> See Historisches Archiv Krupp, WA 41/ 73-256, pag. 2-5; "Sportanlage der Betriebsgemeinschaft Krupp. Gestern feierliche Übergabe," *Essener Anzeiger*, Jul. 19, 1937; "Sportplatzweihe und Wettkämpfe. Betriebsgemeinschaft Krupp übernahm ihre neue Sportplatzanlage," *Nationalzeitung*, Jul. 17, 1937; "Der Kruppsche Sportplatz wurde eingeweiht. Eine freudige Feierstunde der Betriebsgemeinschaft Krupp", *Essener Allgemeine Zeitung*, Jul. 19, 1937; "Sportplatzweihe bei Krupp. Direktor Schlegel übergab den Platz. Prachtvolle sportliche Wettkämpfe," *Essener Volkszeitung*, Jul. 19, 1937.) For a broader history of Krupp and sports, beyond the Third Reich, cf. Walter Borgers, *Krupp und der Sport Anmerkungen zu Sport und Sportförderung der Familie und des Unternehmens* (Neuss: Alfons-Gerz-Ges. für Publizistische Medien und Sport, 1988).

<sup>290</sup> Other sources reveal quite clearly that KdF was indeed behind sports for workers at Krupp, formally at the very least. In its edition of August 15, 1936, the company's newsletter *Krupp: Zeitschrift der Kruppschen Betriebsgemeinschaft* (Newspaper of Krupp's Factory Community) rejoices that "many factories, also those of the Krupp company, have fortunately recognized the greatness and the value of 'KdF-Sports' and have instituted so-called Factory Sports Classes [...]. 'Volksgesundung durch Betriebssport: Zwei Jahre 'Kraft durch Freude' – Sport im Gau Essen,'" *Krupp: Zeitschrift der Kruppschen Betriebsgemeinschaft*, Aug. 15, 1936, 429.



attempt to emphasize that the company was actually responsible and in charge, despite KdF's involvement, or that it at least reflects Krupp's perception that it was in charge – a perception that was then mirrored by the local media.

Such omissions can also be encountered in the sources for sports in the Borsig company. As we learn from 1942 report, the company owned several sports facilities that its employees could use, including both a large and small sports hall; an athletic field and two fields for other games; two sites for outdoor gymnastics; a *Thingplatz* [an amphitheater for *völkisch* theater performances] with seating for 600 people; a temporary boat house and a community building. Most of these amenities were located in a park near Borsig's factory grounds; additional facilities were rented out. For a fee of 0.50 Reichsmark, Borsig workers could attend classes in bowling, shooting, swimming, 'fistball' 9a form of volleyball), football, tennis, track and field, apparatus gymnastics, the exercise wheel, judo, weightlifting, boxing, fencing and floor gymnastics. All costs for the maintenance of the facilities were paid by the company.<sup>291</sup> The entire report on sports at Borsig never mentions KdF nor the German Labor Front.<sup>292</sup> This omission, however, does not necessarily mean that KdF was not involved, at least in a formal capacity. In fact, I would suggest that this gap should be read as a sign that while KdF would have been the official organizer of the courses – according to the regulations that were in effect since 1936 – most of the activities (and all expenses) were actually carried

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<sup>291</sup> See DTMB, I. 2.001. 578; "Bericht über das soziale Geschehen im Werk Borsig der Rheinmetall-Borsig Aktengesellschaft," 24-6.

<sup>292</sup> In the report as a whole, which summarizes all of the social events at Borsig, KdF is mentioned with its groups (music, chess, collecting and crafts) as well as its organization of concerts and exhibitions in the factory and theatre performances outside. (See DTMB, I. 2.001. 578; "Bericht über das soziale Geschehen im Werk Borsig der Rheinmetall-Borsig Aktengesellschaft," 23.)

out by Borsig. This imbalance was probably the reason for KdF not being mentioned.

Similar understatement or omission of KdF's role in Factory Sports can also be encountered at the Osram company in Berlin. One plausible reason for this is the fact that, company-facilitated activities in the field of sports were not all that novel despite KdF's propagandistic announcements to that effect. Organized by the *Sportliche Vereinigung Osram e.V.* [Sports Association Osram, SVO for short,<sup>293</sup>] company sports activities had begun in 1909, making Osram the first German company to found a sports association of this kind. KdF started to get involved in its work as early as April 1934;<sup>294</sup> the official transformation of the association into a Factory Sports Community took place in 1937.<sup>295</sup> This shift was symbolized by the change of Osram's sports emblem. From 1937 on, the DAF's cog-wheel was superimposed onto the traditional flag of Osram's sports association, an indubitable signifier of the appropriation of the formerly company-run sports at Osram by KdF/DAF (see below.)<sup>296</sup>



#### KdF's "takeover" of Company Sports

Fig. 3.1 The banner of the monthly newsletter on sports at Osram (here from Sept. 1939) with the DAF gear wheel and swastika logo: earlier newsletters displayed only the Osram flag and the old name of Osram's (company) sports association, "SVO." (LA Berlin Rep. 231 Nr. 768.)

<sup>293</sup> The acronym "e.V." stands for "*eingetragener Verein*," which, according to German Civil Code, means the club was a "registered voluntary association," with a status and series of legal benefits above a mere (unregistered) group of people.

<sup>294</sup> See LA Berlin A Rep. 231, Nr. 768, pag. 16-7.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. LA Berlin A Rep 231 Nr. 28, pag. 337. The previous header for the newsletter simply bore the BSG flag; this transformation was probably a reaction to von Tschammer und Osten's aforementioned decree that put KdF's Sports Department in charge of all company sports.

<sup>296</sup> The newsletter of May 1937 seems to have been the first with the new banner; see LA Berlin A Rep 231 Nr. 768.

The editorial line taken by Osram's newsletter, however, was not that the sports association had "surrendered" to KdF, but that KdF's involvement was a logical continuation of the company's sports association's history; Osram's SVO had in its 25 years of existence always embodied the values for which KdF stood, or so the newsletter claimed in one article about the association's status. Interestingly, this point having been made, the Nazi organization is no longer mentioned for the (lengthier) remainder of the article. Instead, the text advertises the company's sports facilities and the 14 different kinds of sports offered, concluding with an appeal that connects engagement in sports with patriotism, but not KdF, invoking the "pulse of today: strengthening of the people for the sake of the fatherland."<sup>297</sup> The document is signed "*Sportliche Vereinigung Osram, SVO- Leitung*," the association's name – again, no mention of KdF.

It is curious to see how, on the one hand, reference to KdF is omitted, but, on the other, the history and character of Osram's SVO is described in a way that fits into KdF's (and thus Nazism's) organizational framework.<sup>298</sup> I would suggest that this should be read as an attempt by Osram to retain its autonomy in the arena of sports but without confronting the Nazi leisure organization. On the other hand, it also shows how KdF's

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<sup>297</sup> LA Berlin A Rep. 231 Nr. 428, notice by the Osram AG, without date.

<sup>298</sup> Fritz Kleeberg, for example, Osram's *Betriebsobmann* (i.e. shop steward; referring here to the German Labor Front's representative at Osram) writes the following in the SVO newsletter when congratulating 30 years of sports at Osram, drawing strong parallels between KdF's goals and what Osram's sports association had always done: "Germany is in need of strong, able-bodied people more than ever. Physical exercise, in fact the general maintenance of the good health of the German people through sports, is one of our noblest duties to the *Führer*. I joyfully declare on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of our company's sports community that in the past years it has devotedly contributed to the education of people's comrades which were toughened through physical exercises for the company and for our fatherland. (LA Berlin Rep. 231 Nr. 768; Fritz Kleeberg, in *Osram- Sport: Monatsnachrichten der Betriebssportgemeinschaft Osram*, April/ May 1939, 8.)

work in the field of factory sports was not genuinely original.<sup>299</sup> However, the organization succeeded in claiming this area and its positive reputation for itself in the public. Operating at this level of “appearances” might seem to have been sufficient for KdF, achieving what it considered of most importance, while being a useful “harmonizing” tactic for KdF/DAF functionaries.

The testimony of the former head of all of Krupp’s cultural institutions,<sup>300</sup> Dr. Karl Fuss, illustrates how limited the options were for companies trying to keep KdF at bay: concession or compromise were inevitable. According to Fuss, Krupp successfully managed to avoid either political intervention by Nazi organizations or their involvement in the realm of social institutions at Krupp, such as the library and musical associations. This, however, came at a price: to avoid more general Nazi involvement in Krupp, the company had to accept, as an exception, the involvement of the German Labor Front in the area of company sports; this simply “could not be circumvented.”<sup>301</sup> That this was the exception demanded of Krupp seems to testify to the importance of KdF and its sports offerings in the Nazi scheme of things. However, if forced to allow the DAF/KdF into the arena of company sports, Krupp still tried to maintain its own influence in this arena: while admitting that company sports “was in fact not the business of the company, but an

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<sup>299</sup> It might be arguable that we can see here at the same time both Osram taking over KdF’s claims as their own and KdF taking over Osram’s claims as their own.

<sup>300</sup> This Krupp department, called “*Werkbildungswesen*” (Company Education System), included in 1938 all of Krupp’s cultural institutions, for example, the Krupp’s singing club, workers’ library and educational society. (Cf. Historisches Archiv Krupp, WA 40 B1334, pag. 10; statement declared on oath by Dr. Karl Fuss, without date.)

<sup>301</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, WA 40 B1334, pag. 10; statement declared on oath by Dr. Karl Fuss, without date. In a letter from December 22, 1947, Fuss writes that he, as the head of all of Krupp’s cultural institutions, was never affiliated to KdF, claiming that this shows that Krupp’s institutions were distant from Nazi influence (Historisches Archiv Krupp, WA 40 B1334, pag. 16; letter by Fuss to Dr. Hennig, Dec. 22, 1947.)

affair for the German Labor Front,” Fuss also claimed that “company wanted ‘to keep [its] fingers in that, given that [it] also authorized the funds” for sporting activities and facilities.<sup>302</sup> Overall, Fuss’s statement highlights Krupp’s resistive attitude towards KdF’s attempted entry into its social policy, but also how the company had to give finally give in. This seems to have led, however, to a situation where KdF’s actual power was less large than it officially seemed; Krupp still had “its fingers” in leisure events at the company, and was not infrequently the main organizer of these.

This assessment of Krupp’s sports as only formally “Nazi” and part of a national socialist organization is confirmed by Herr H., a worker at one of Krupp’s steel-mills, who was active as a weightlifter in Krupp’s Factory Sports Community during the Third Reich. In an interview from 1983, he stated, when asked about “voluntary sports outside the Hitler Youth”:

I was later active in weightlifting, [...] [run] by the fat Kallenberg, we had in the Steel-Mill II, [...] there was this so-called BSG, that is *Betriebssportgemeinschaft*, right, and there I took part in weight training, but that had nothing to do with Nazis. That was like, oh well, fine, they were standing behind it, they were behind it, right, but there was no organization as such [run by Nazis]. [Archiv “Dt Gedächtnis,” interview with Herr H. and his wife, Mar. 16, 1983.]

From this statement, as from the writings on company sports we have already discussed, those which omitted KdF, we see an ongoing struggle between the companies and KdF about the organization of sports. The resistance of the companies may mean that KdF was not entirely successful in this area, but the resistance itself also indicates the ongoing attempts by the Nazi leisure organization to intrude into the everyday affairs of the companies. KdF’s activities in German factories, which were so broadly celebrated in

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<sup>302</sup> Historisches Archiv Krupp, WA 40 B1334, pag. 16; letter by Fuss to Dr. Hennig, Dec. 22, 1947.

KdF's own propaganda, were apparently often merely appropriations of previously existing company sports facilities by the leisure organization.

This type of reading is also supported by Fasbender's work; for the Ruhr area, he demonstrates that in some companies, KdF's entry into the realm of factory sports did not actually make much of a difference, observing that between 1936 and 1938, "former company sports club chairmen [often] continued to run the business in the positions of factory sports attendants [*Betriebssportwarte*.]"<sup>303</sup> This case of the Schering company in Berlin provides an example of this continuity in personnel. Sports for workers at Schering's factories dated back to 1928, when the *Sportverein der Schering Kahlbaum AG* was founded.<sup>304</sup> According to Paul Bauer, co-founder of the company sports association at Schering and chronicler of its history, the incorporation of the *Schering Sportverein* into the network of the German Labor Front and KdF took place comparatively late, only in 1938.<sup>305</sup> Upon this change, many members abandoned the company's sports organization, now named "*BSG (Betriebssportgemeinschaft) Schering*," some quit because of the need to comply with compulsory service, others

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<sup>303</sup> Fasbender, "Zwischen Arbeitersport und Arbeitssport," 252. Fasbender also suggests that for the Krupp company, there were even "signs that [...] against the expressed order of the KdF Sports Department, there was a double-tracked procedure with regards to company sports. The traditional *Kruppsche Turngemeinde* (Gymnastics Community of Krupp) appears to have continued to exist, alongside the newly established Factory Sports Community of Krupp, and to have continued to receive benefits from the company under its old name. (Fasbender, "Zwischen Arbeitersport und Arbeitssport," 252.)

<sup>304</sup> For Osram, see LA Berlin A Rep. 231, Nr. 768, pag. 11. For Schering, see Schering, B1-559/1; Paul Bauer, *Geschichte des Betriebssports Scherings am Betriebsort Berlin, 1928 -1998*, 2. The association's founding charter emphasized its political non-alignment, stating that it wanted to offer "sports without influence from 'left or right.'" (Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 2.)

<sup>305</sup> Schering, B1 559/1; Paul Bauer, "Geschichte des Betriebssports Schering am Standort Berlin, 1928 -1998. Band 1 (1928 bis 1945)," 9. Bauer reports that, as regards the work of the Schering sports club, this change meant "'massive' attention was paid to the fact that the German Reich's laws were being adhered to." The club now was to observe the Nuremberg Laws and to undertake a "cleansing of elements hostile to the people [*Säubern von volksfeindlichen Elementen*]" (Ibid., 10.)

because they had voluntarily joined the *Wehrmacht*. A third group left because of “internal resistance, [wishing] not to sacrifice the ‘*Sportverein Schering*’ to a different idea.”<sup>306</sup> In Bauer’s portrayal, those who remained in Schering’s Factory Sports Communities did so *despite* the new regime, simply remaining in “their club” and carrying on as they had before KdF’s takeover. His report also suggests that the extinction of the association’s old name, “*Schering-Sportverein*,” was not very successful. According to Bauer, it remained alive both in everyday conversations and internal publications. Thus, from Bauer’s account, we see an image of a somewhat forced takeover of the Schering sport club, which was met with some resistance from members, but which ended up, however, hardly changing the club’s outlook significantly.

His report, however, and its general description of a lack of sympathy for, and even antipathy towards, KdF, must be taken with a grain of salt. After all, Bauer himself was not only part of Schering’s sports association, but also had a leading position in it; in an article from 1941 in the company’s newspaper, he is in fact listed as Schering’s Factory Sports Attendant (*Betriebssportwart*)!<sup>307</sup> One must also take into consideration that Bauer wrote his history of Schering sports in the late 1990s – i.e. with a post-war perspective and possibly the motivation to depict himself and his fellow sportsmen and women in as positive a light as possible. Thus, the strong emphasis on non-complicity with the Nazi regime and disentanglement from its ideology could be skewed, whether reflexively or intentionally, towards euphemism rather than accurate reporting.

In fact, the numeric data given in Bauer’s report supports a reading of Schering

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<sup>306</sup> Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 10.

<sup>307</sup> See Schering, SB 1935-1949; *Werkzeitschrift für die Betriebsgemeinschaft der Schering AG*, Jahrgang IV, Heft 4/5 (Juli/ September 1941), 59.

sports that emphasizes collaboration with, rather than resistance to, Nazism's reach into the sphere of sports activities at Schering (even granting the possibility that this was collaboration without real commitment.) In 1938, after KdF's takeover, the BSG Schering had 167 members. This was indeed a smaller number than in the previous year, when the Schering's *Sportverein* – under Bauer as its newly-elected *Vereinsführer* [club leader] – had had more than 391 members.<sup>308</sup> However, the decline in membership appears to have been merely temporary. Soon the membership rose again, in fact reaching new heights – whether despite or because KdF now ran it. In September of 1939, the BSG Schering had 600 associates, even with membership having been restricted to Schering employees after January 1939.<sup>309,310</sup> These high numbers suggest that KdF's "takeover" of Schering's company sports had proceeded without many difficulties and was even popular. Schering employees who used to do sports at their company's *Sportverein* continued to do so when it was run by the KdF, despite a few hard feelings and grumblings of discontent. As a matter of fact, on the basis of the (admittedly sparse)

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<sup>308</sup> Bauer's chronicle states that 391 people attended the club's annual assembly – it is possible that the club had even more members at this point. (Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 8.)

<sup>309</sup> See Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 11 and 13.

<sup>310</sup> By then, Schering's workers could participate through its Factory Sports Community in handball, football, swimming, shooting, bowling, rowing, tennis and track and field, as well as gymnastics and cross country running. There were constant competitions in several disciplines between teams from Schering and other BSGs. The beginning of World War II led to limitations on KdF sports at Schering, mainly due to the draft of many of the company's athletes into the *Wehrmacht*; in May 1940 two thirds of the (male) members had been conscripted. The membership structure of the BSG became more female. (See Schering, B1-559; "Nachrichten zu Betriebs-Sportgemeinschaft," Nr. 5, May 1940.). This affected mainly the sections for handball, football and track and field. Generally, however, sports at Schering managed to endure during the war years. As Bauer points out in his chronicle, as late as March 1945 KdF still requested, absurdly, that women participate in gymnastics classes amidst bombs and destruction in Berlin. (See Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 19.) According to Bauer, by 1944, participation in the sports activities at Schering had declined, in reaction to the general political circumstances and a growing "'internal resistance' towards Nazi party followers continually issuing commands during sports." (Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 18.)



source material on Schering sports, no significant change in procedure after KdF's involvement can be detected. Most crucially, the erstwhile head of the *Sportverein* – Paul Bauer – carried on functioning as (KdF) *Betriebssportwart*. Here we see a clear continuity in the practice of factory sports, with KdF having a rather limited influence on matters of daily business.<sup>311</sup> In fact, it might have been just this continuity that led to the success of KdF Factory Sport Communities. For the Ruhr area, Fasbender shows that the number of factory sports communities soon exceeded the number of traditional company sports clubs, at least on paper.<sup>312</sup> According to a Krupp manager this “success” was based on the fact “that, actually, despite the new name, everything remained as it had been before the transformation.”<sup>313</sup>

Fasbender argues that the conflicted relationship between companies and KdF must be seen against the larger background of Nazi economic politics.<sup>314</sup> KdF's entry

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<sup>311</sup> Within the *Sportverein*, there were personnel changes after 1933 which were (apparently) reactions to the Nazi government and its politics. These occurred, however, prior to KdF's involvement. In 1933, a Dr. Lorenz, responsible for football at Schering, stepped down from his position. About this, Bauer writes in his chronicle: “According to the memories of contemporary witnesses, his resignation was caused by ‘pressure from outside.’” In 1935, the head of the *Sportverein*, Herr Kielblock, a Jew, left his office. Bauer, who benefited from this, because he succeeded Kielblock in this position (which Bauer had formerly held in 1929, after the foundation of the club), writes that the opinions of contemporary witnesses “on the reason for this leave-taking balanced each other out. Some thought that he [Kielblock] wanted to preempt an ‘Aryan cleansing.’ Others saw his reaching of retirement age as the reason.” (Schering, B1-559/1; Bauer, *Betriebssport Schering*, 4.)

<sup>312</sup> See Fasbender, “Zwischen Arbeitersport und Arbeitssport,” 262. However, in spite of its growing membership numbers, KdF factory sports was far from reaching all German workers in the Ruhr companies: in the *Gaus* of Essen, Westphalia-North and Westphalia-South, only 6%, 17% and 15%, respectively, of all workers who signed up for Factory Sports Communities actually took part in KdF sports activities. [See Matthias Frese et al., *Betriebspolitik im “Dritten Reich”: Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Unternehmer und Staatsbürokratie in der westdeutschen Großindustrie 1933 - 1939*, 2 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991), 402.]

<sup>313</sup> Quoted in Fasbender, “Zwischen Arbeitersport und Arbeitssport,” 262.

<sup>314</sup> He bases this argument on Matthias Frese's work on industrial policy in Western Germany from 1933 to 1939 and the triangle of DAF, state bureaucracy and entrepreneurs (Frese et al., *Betriebspolitik im “Dritten Reich”: Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Unternehmer und Staatsbürokratie in der westdeutschen Großindustrie 1933 - 1939*.)

into the field of company sports was, in this view, an attempt by KdF's umbrella organization DAF to win more influence over the inner politics of companies in order to eventually have more power to determine the economic decisions of these companies and of Germany overall. Von Tschammer und Osten's decree on the abolishing of company sports clubs, and their replacement by KdF factory sports communities came at a moment of heightened conflict between the Nazi regime and the industrial companies of the Ruhr area.<sup>315</sup>

Hajo Bernett, who produced seminal work on sports in the Third Reich, has argued for another, more economically orientated, reason for KdF's intervention in the realm of company sports. His article on KdF sports presents the leisure organization's engagement with company sports as first and foremost a financially-driven project.<sup>316</sup> He emphasizes that KdF's transferring of sports activities into the realm of factories brought financial relief to the leisure organization, since it meant that now the respective companies paid for these sports activities. KdF, whose work (including that in the sector of sports) was overall a loss-making undertaking,<sup>317</sup> was thus no longer drawing on its own or DAF funds in achieving one of its important aims. Bernett bases his argument

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<sup>315</sup> The conflict was about the smelting of domestic iron ore in the yet-to-be-established Hermann-Göring-Werke in Salzgitter as part of the Nazi vision of economic autarky for Germany and its economic Four-Year-Plan. For Fasbender, this larger conflict – “won” by the Nazi regime – is responsible for the belligerent tone he finds in the negotiations between the managements of Ruhr companies and representatives of the KdF Sports Department, surrounding company sports. In other words, company managements saw the installing of Factory Sports Communities as yet another form of intrusion into their internal decisions (on top of those made by the Four-Year- Plan); hence, their strong ambivalence and opposition to these activities.

<sup>316</sup> Hajo Bernett, “Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport bei ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” *Stadion* 5, no. 1 (1979): 89-146.

<sup>317</sup> Buchholz's dissertation cites for the Sports Department (FY 1936/37) a business volume of ca. two million *Reichsmark*, but a subvention five times higher than that. (Wolfhard Buchholz, “Die nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude’ : Freizeitgestaltung und Arbeiterschaft im Dritten Reich” (Dissertation, Ludwig Maximilian University, 1976), 124.

partly on a statement by a former KdF administrator, who wrote in 1946, “[to] refloat the stranded boat [of KdF sports classes], the work of the Sports Department was now relocated into the companies.”<sup>318</sup> However, there is evidence that this strategy failed. Despite the shift to sports in companies, in 1939 subventions for KdF sports still stood in a ratio of 5-1 against the revenue it gained from sports classes.<sup>319</sup>

Bernett’s work also leads us to the debate about the militarization of KdF’s sports. He argues that the character of KdF’s sports underwent a fundamental change after its entry into the area of company sports. Once active in the realm of companies, he claims, KdF sports activities became more competitive, losing the “fun component” of their earlier years.<sup>320</sup> For Bennett, this development meant that KdF’s sports activities transformed into disciplinary measures; they became more closely involved in the Nazi effort to build both factory communities and, eventually, the envisioned “racial community.”<sup>321</sup> He sees this as a transformation both of sports into a “mechanism of integration” and “of leisure offerings into a means of socio-political mobilization and stabilization.”<sup>322</sup> As evidence for this argument, he quotes Ley’s statement that KdF sports (fields) in factories were to become the “drill grounds of the factory community.”<sup>323</sup> However, I think that Bennett’s argument about KdF’s Factory Sports

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<sup>318</sup> See G. Mumme, quoted after Bennett, “Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport bei ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” 115.

<sup>319</sup> Bennett, “Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport,” 115, and Buchholz, “Die nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” 124.

<sup>320</sup> See Bennett, “Nationalsozialistischer Volkssport bei ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” 118.

<sup>321</sup> See *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>322</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>323</sup> Robert Ley in 1937, quoted after *Ibid.*, 114.

losing their “fun component” is not correct and thus intend my following analysis to refute his conclusion.<sup>324</sup> The aims of joy and playfulness were very present in this arena and KdF offerings in factories maintained KdF’s overall emphasis on fun.<sup>325</sup> The assertion from Ley that factory sports were drill grounds is indeed militaristic in tone, but this does not mean it should be read as a contradiction of (or shift away from) the leisure organization’s main objective of “joy production.” In fact, the quotation simply highlights that KdF’s sports activities were, as they had been from their very beginning, concerned about the building of *community*; and when we consider actual KdF activities, this was always *through* fun.

A closer look at sports for workers at Osram, as part of a KdF-run (since 1937) “Factory Sports Community,” reveals that KdF’s general goal of “joy production” was clearly present at this company too. By 1939, twelve different types of sports were

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<sup>324</sup> Bernett’s argument was directed at all of KdF’s sports; KdF’s sports losing its “fun component” was in this view connected a limit of KdF’s sports to Factory Sports only. However, I have found no official statement by KdF directly confirming that there was in fact a general shift which led to KdF sports *only* being situated in the realm of companies – for example, an order to drastically scale down KdF’s “own,” independent activities in favor of those in factories. KdF propaganda usually depicted its work in the factories as a natural continuation or enlargement of, rather than replacement for, its previous work. Neither do numbers for KdF sports offerings outside the factories suggest a stark decline after 1936. In fact, the numbers still grow. (Buchholz, “Die nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude,’” 296. However, Buchholz calls this a “hard to believe increase,” pointing to the fact that these official KdF numbers might be manipulated. But there is no reason to believe that the numbers were so manufactured that they were meant to “hide” a decrease; rather, it is likely that a stagnation or small increase was over-emphasized in order to be used propagandistically.) Also, financial data quoted by Bernett for 1939 supports my claim; the persistently high subvention rates for KdF sports suggests that many of these activities still took place outside the (company-funded) arena of factory sports. For these KdF sports outside factories, KdF sources do suggest a shift from a “more playful” to a “performance-oriented” character. Nevertheless, while the competitive character was indeed present, “playful,” game-oriented offerings continued to be a central part of KdF sports classes. For example, a KdF publication on the organization’s work in the 1941, lists “Happy Gymnastics” [*Fröhliche Gymnastik*] as the first discipline, still offered by KdF’s Sports Department and still amongst its most popular classes. [Bodo Lafferentz, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude im Kriegsjahr 1941* (Verl. d. Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1942), 30.]

<sup>325</sup> Even though, as Fasbender points out, this did not always lead to the desired result of having as many people as possible take part in KdF activities on the shop floor. (Cf. Fasbender, “Zwischen Arbeitersport und Arbeitssport,” 262.)

offered at Osram: “Gymnastics, football, track and field, handball, swimming, boxing, hockey, tennis, rowing, skiing, bowling, table-tennis,” with special women’s groups for the disciplines of gymnastics, track and field, handball, swimming, hockey and rowing. The SVO was equipped with a large 25,000m<sup>2</sup> sports area in Berlin as well as several smaller sports fields situated at Osram’s individual factory sites. Both grounds and buildings had been financed by the company. The amenities available to Osram’s workers included “a spacious club house,” with a bar, several “conveniently equipped community rooms,” a “large grass sports field” and “regulation dirt track;” “six well-tended tennis courts;” “a magnificent swimming lake” adorned with a beach, diving platform and 25-meter-swimming lanes; “two ample boathouses with all technical novelties,” five jetties and two “simple, but healthy sleeping rooms for the rowers with altogether 40 beds.”<sup>326</sup> Pictures of Osram’s sports facilities, as published by the Factory Sports Community in 1939, are reproduced below. Evidently, rather prosperous and luxurious provisions were made for athletes and workers at Osram, with a clear focus on health and relaxation.<sup>327</sup>

The images reproduced on this page and the next, taken from the Osram sports

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<sup>326</sup> LA Berlin Rep. 231 Nr. 768; *Osram- Sport: Monatsnachrichten der Betriebssportsgemeinschaft Osram*; Jan. 1938, 3.

<sup>327</sup> It needs to be reiterated that this was not a result of KdF’s efforts, but rather grew out of an old tradition of company sports at Osram. The leisure organization (or DAF, as its superordinate institution) simply “inherited” these facilities, taking them over as its “own” programs and activities.



### Swimming at Osram

Fig 3.2 (left): Swim Day at Osram's swimming and rowing lake; Fig 3.3 (right) Indoor swimming for Osram workers (both: LA Berlin Rep. 231 Nr. 768; *Osram-Sport.* )

### Joyful sports at the Osram Company

Fig. 3.4. Photographs depicting Osram workers doing sports. (LA Berlin Rep. 231 Nr. 768; *Osram-Sport.*)]

newsletter portray fit and healthy men and women. Often, groups are displayed, emphasizing the community character of Osram sports. Factory life or work is totally absent from these pictures; instead, they resemble advertisements for a holiday resort, focusing on health, fitness, pleasure and relaxation. Many of the female athletes, in particular, are smiling

(although due to the size and quality of the reproductions here, it is difficult to make this out.<sup>328</sup>) Company sports at Osram thus seems to have been a joyful affair, hardly lacking a “fun component,” *pace* Bennett’s argument about Factory Sports Communities. As the pictures above illustrate, KdF’s work in the arena of company sports was, like all its activities, motivated by the urge to produce “everyday joy” for Germans. Via Factory Sports Communities, KdF could, conveniently building on already existing infrastructures created by individual companies, reach workers directly at their

<sup>328</sup> For more pictures of KdF *Betriebssport* (in other German companies) and on the role of “joy” in KdF sports, see chapter one.

workplaces, turning shop floors into spaces of leisure and fun.

In addition to regular sports classes at factories such as Osram, KdF and DAF involved themselves in workers' sports by organizing the so-called *Sportappell* [Sports Muster – note the militaristic expression.] This event was inaugurated in June 1938 by Ley and von Tschammer und Osten; all German companies were expected to take part in this.<sup>329</sup> In its first year, it targeted all men between 18 and 55 as participants; in 1939, this was extended to female workers between 21 and 30.<sup>330</sup> KdF's Sports Department executed the event, which, in its inaugural year, consisted of three parts. The first one was motivationally titled "*Wettbewerb des Guten Willens*" ["Competition of Good Will";] here, the workers had to pass three disciplines: pushing a medicine ball (for at least 6.5m with a 3 kilo ball or 8.5m with a 2 kilo ball), long jump (at least 2.80 m) and run (1,000m in under 6 minutes). The *Sportappell's* second part was a team competition in hurdles, pushing medicine balls and 1,000m relay running. The third part was then an evaluation of the size of the given company's factory sports communities and its overall performance.<sup>331</sup> We can see from the details of this program that KdF's main motivation for this event was not the promotion of stellar individual performances. Rather, the Sports Department aimed to target as many workers as possible and inspire them to do (more)

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<sup>329</sup> Since neither Ley nor the *Reichssportsführer* appear to have been in the position to "decree" such a nationwide event for all German factory workers, Ley made do with an "appeal," whose text concludes with his expectation "that all German companies take part without exception in this Sports Muster and thus make a significant contribution towards the Reich Sports Leader's goal of 'A People [combined] in Physical Exercise.'" (DTMB, I. 2.024 059; Robert Ley, "Aufruf des Reichsorganisationsleiters zum Sportappell der Betriebe 1938.")

<sup>330</sup> See *Osram-Bekanntmachung*, Nr. 38/38 (LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 Nr. 427,2) and *Osram-Bekanntmachung* Nr. 39/42, (LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 Nr. 427,1) The *Sportappell* took place at least until 1942; see Helmut Heiber, 4: *Regesten Band 2* (Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1983), 842.

<sup>331</sup> See DTMB, I. 2.024 059.

sports by organizing these special events. In addition, the *Sportappell*, with its emphasis on community, must be seen as another tool of KdF in order to further the building of (a factory) community.

In each company, the *Betriebssportwart* [Factory Sports Attendant] was responsible for his company's employees' participation in this event. Announcements made in that regard sometimes suggest that the *Sportappell* was not exactly popular with the workers and that organizers had a hard time motivating people, thus employing a somewhat coercive or at least slightly accusatory tone.<sup>332</sup> I could not find any evidence about any repercussions or punishment for workers who missed events of this kind, and the announcements also shy away from alluding to anything of this sort. Still, the responsible individuals at the companies may have at least attempted to put a certain amount of pressure on workers to attend these events. Ley's aforementioned statement on

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<sup>332</sup> A 1941 notice for a *Sportappell der Betriebe* at Osram states: "The demands are so low and the site is so convenient, that this time each worker will be able to participate as long as he is equipped with goodwill." (The original German text employs, instead of "*Arbeiter*" [worker] the Nazi term "*Gefolgschaftsmitglied*" [member of the allegiance], which simply refers to the individual worker. Nazi propaganda, in its attempt to foster, or even feign, the existence of a unified "racial community," labeled the entire workforce of a company as a "*Gefolgschaft*," (allegiance), emphasizing its unity, commitment and also a hierarchical aspect, since the German word "*Gefolgschaft*" is connected to the verb "*folgen*" [to follow]. The members of a company "*Gefolgschaft*" were to follow their "*Betriebsführer*" [leader of the company – the Nazi term for CEO], and, of course, ultimately the "*Führer*" of Germany, Adolf Hitler.) The announcement then ended with a slogan in the form of a couplet, which questioned the community commitment of those individuals who did not take part in the sports event, especially in times of war: "Our slogan is: If your wish for community is truthful, then you take part, now more than ever!" ["*Unsere Losung lautet: Ist Dein Gemeinschaftswille echt, dann machst du mit, diesmal erst recht!* "] (LA Berlin A Rep. 231 Nr. 431, Bd. 1, pag. 194; *Osram Bekanntmachung an die Gefolgschaftsmitglieder der Berliner OK-Betriebe*, Sep. 11, 1941.) This 1941 text may be a reaction to workers not showing up for the *Sportappell* at their company in earlier years. Already at the first of these events in 1938, Osram's management and the sports organizers at this company appear to have anticipated possible "passive resistance." Their announcement from August 1938 includes the following – somewhat threatening – assertion about the upcoming *Sportappell*: "Nobody will exclude himself, all the more since nothing impossible is demanded." *Osram-Bekanntmachung*, Nr. 38/38 (LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 Nr. 427,2). With such phrases, company bosses and sports attendants fulfilled Ley's order to appeal to all workers without exception to participate in the nationwide *Sportappell*. (DTMB, I. 2.024 059; Letter from the KdF Sports Department of the county in Annaberg from Apr. 20, 1939 to all company leaders and DAF and KdF representatives of companies in Annaberg, relating an announcement by Ley.)



the occasion of the inauguration of the Sports Muster claimed that it was to be a “powerful demonstration of the idea of physical education and that it should also bring the last people’s comrade to the realm of sports and this out of free will and desire.” The reality of the *Sportappell*, however, appears to lack some of the freedom of which Ley boasted.<sup>333</sup> The Sports Muster took place outside working hours, cutting into the workers’ already quite limited free time. Reading between the lines of the *Sportappell* announcement, it appears as if many workers resented KdF’s invasion into their free time and did not take part in the event. Bennett’s argument about KdF sports in factories being militarized builds mainly on his analyses of KdF’s Sports Musters.<sup>334</sup> Images of KdF



bpb bildarchiv preussischerNo: 30039064, bpk  
K kulturbesitz "Kraft durch Freude" - Betriebssport: Appell zum Betriebssport in der Waggon- und Ma...

Sports Musters, such as those included in this chapter’s section, do seem to highlight their pseudo-militaristic form.<sup>335</sup> The first one (left), from around 1938, shows the flag ceremony at the beginning

**Factory Sports Muster:**

Fig. 3.5 Factory Sports Muster of the workers of a factory in Bautzen, Saxony, around 1938.

[Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image Nr. 300390640.]

<sup>333</sup> Robert Ley, “Aufruf des Reichsorganisationsleiters zum Sportapell der Betriebe 1938” (DTMB, I. 2.024 059).

<sup>334</sup> I thus also find a weakness in his overall argument in that he extrapolates from Sports Musters to KdF sports in factories in general. These, however, were only one element of KdF factory sports, and were rather “extraordinary,” occurring only a few times per year. KdF’s “normal” sports activities in factories happened more frequently, and were, as far as I can tell from my analysis of the sources, by no means eclipsed by the Sports Muster events, but generally were rather independent of them.

<sup>335</sup> This might have been another reason for their seeming unpopularity.

of a KdF sports event in a railway wagon and machine manufacturing plant in Bautzen, Saxony. Displaying the employees of the factory lined up in ranks during the ceremony, the image indeed evinces a certain militarized character.



**“Sports Muster of Good Will”**

Fig. 3.6 “*Sportappell des Guten Willens*” for Volkswagen employees in 1941. Although marching in a military-like formation, some of the participants are smiling.

(Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image Nr. 30032184.)



**“Forming up for Factory Sports.”**

Fig. 3.7 “*Antreten zum Betriebssport*.” This image was used to illustrate KdF’s Sports Muster in its publication entitled “Under the Sun-Wheel.” (Karl Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad* [Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1938], 171.)

A similarly militaristic mood appears to have prevailed at a sports event in 1941 for employees of the Volkswagen factory in Wolfsburg, Lower Saxony, pictured above. The photograph shows the participants and the judges marching onto the sports field, probably at the beginning of the event, which is called “Sports Muster of Good Will.” However, while marching in military formation, many

of the participants are in fact smiling, not maintaining the solemn bearing of a marching soldier. This is also the case in the second image, taken from a KdF publication called

*Unter dem Sonnenrad*,<sup>336</sup> (see above.) The photograph's caption is "Forming Up [*Antreten*] for Factory Sports," a slogan from military discourse; it shows a delegation of worker-athletes, men and women, lined up in orderly rank (see above). However, many of these, despite their formal posture and military-like bearing, are smiling, as if in joyful anticipation of the coming sporting activities, or perhaps just because they are enjoying themselves in this moment.<sup>337</sup> Granted, these are pictures published as propaganda for KdF – and the organization was surely concerned to present a positive image of itself, and was thus unlikely to depict visibly unhappy or discontented people. Nevertheless, it is of importance to note that KdF chose a picture that showed people who looked "happy" rather than militarily strict and serious, in this way relaxing or undermining the disciplinary aspect of their ranked formation. I would thence argue that this photographic evidence, or rather, propagandistic choice, speaks to KdF's project of "joy production" rather than an emphasis of militaristic education.<sup>338</sup> Other images of KdF Sports events, including Sports Musters, provide further evidence that they were not exclusively about discipline and military-style training, but instead had a strong component of "fun," like that I have already identified in regular KdF classes (outside the context of factory sports.) For example, another picture from the aforementioned 1941 "Sports Muster of Good Will" by Volkswagen workers conveys an image of the event that was not as militaristic

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<sup>336</sup> The title, meaning "Under the Sun-Wheel" is an allusion to KdF's emblem, a stylized sun around the DAF-cog-wheel.

<sup>337</sup> Another possibility is, of course, that they smiled because they knew their picture was being taken. However, even this would suggest some readiness to participate in the spirit of the event.

<sup>338</sup> We need to recall here, that "militarization" was not *per se* a negatively connotated value at the time, so we do not have to necessarily assume that a display of "joy production" was merely a hiding of a 'true' project of militarization. It is also worth recalling that, very generally, major sports events such as the Olympics often feature athletes marching with their flags and this is not taken as necessarily militaristic.

as suggested by the earlier picture of the athletes marching in. Instead, we now see a rather playful atmosphere, with Volkswagen employees engaged in physical games (see below.)<sup>339</sup>



#### **Fun and Games at Sports Muster**

Fig. 3.8 Games at the “Sports Muster of Good Will” for Volkswagen-employees, 1941. Note the different clothing of the participants: Both clerks (in suits) and workers “exercise” together. Among the workers, armbands signify master crafts-men (two armbands) and the foremen (one armband). We are intended to see a unified “racial community,” which made sure to display its composition. (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image Nr. 30031928.)

The clothing of the participants provides two important insights for historical analysis. First, the clothing seems to be just what the Volkswagen employees would wear at work, rather than sports attire. This speaks to the fact that KdF was mostly interested in getting everybody to exercise (rather than in motivating top performances from ambitious competitors wearing specialized gear). Second, the diversity of the participants suggests that both workers and clerks took part together rather than in segregated groups. However, the diverse clothing might actually counteract the explicit goal of forming this unified “racial community.” Not only could one easily differentiate clerks and managers (in suits) from workers and craftsmen (in working clothing), but the latter group also made sure to display its internal hierarchy by using armbands to denote rank (two for master craftsmen, one for foremen.) In this sense, KdF’s goal of community building, while probably

<sup>339</sup> The participants are engaging in an exercise called “*Wettziehen als Körperertüchtigung*” [“Competitive pulling as physical exercise”], which seems to be a form of tug-of-war.

consciously attempted through this event, was apparently not really completely fulfilled.



**Joyful KdF Factory Sports**

Fig. 3. 9 Workers having fun at a KdF Factory Sports Event, from 1935 or 1936, location unknown.  
(Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Image Nr.300396063.)

An entirely harmonious community may not have been entirely realized at this event, but what does seem to have been achieved was KdF “joy production.” And in this, the Volkswagen event was not an exception. A similarly cheerful mood appears to have prevailed at a KdF Factory Sports Events from 1935 or 1936 (location unknown, see left.) If

one takes this snapshot to be characteristic of the entire event,<sup>340</sup> it was clearly about “joy production” and entertaining the workers while engaging them in sports.

Pictures like the one above contradict the prevailing assessment, as put forward by Hajo Bernett and others, that Sports Musters were all about militarism and the preparation of workers for an upcoming war effort. While I do not argue that militarism played no role at all, nor deny that these more playful exercises might have worked in the long term to help war preparation by improving the physical condition of Germans, I think it is important to emphasize the non-militaristic, playful and lighthearted character that KdF Factory Sports often had. All of KdF’s sports, including the seemingly

<sup>340</sup> And again, if we are concerned about the propagandistic aspects of such photos, we can at least say that KdF chose to publish photos depicting “joy”.

militaristic Sport Musters, were primarily concerned with “joy production.”<sup>341</sup> And it is this latter characteristic that shaped workers’ experiences of these events (and eventually furthered KdF’s success).<sup>342</sup>

The Nazi government itself created a vacuum through the destruction of the workers’ sports associations and the consequent shutting down of many working class sports clubs: a large number of workers formerly active in sports clubs were now “without club.” Although shutting down sports clubs closed potential sites of working-class opposition to the Nazi regime, this would only be a temporary effect. The Nazis were aware of the danger that the former participants in these clubs could instead start underground activities. KdF’s entry into the realm of company sports was apparently also partly motivated by this fear. Nazi functionaries suspected the independent company sports clubs would secretly become the new haven for former (politically leftist)

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<sup>341</sup> The ambivalence between “joy” and “discipline for war,” which I have pointed to in the realm of KdF sports for workers, has rarely been addressed in the scholarship. Instead, perhaps because of the general militarism and war-mongering of Nazi Germany, many historians have only emphasized the “military” aspect. For these historians, the Nazi engagement in the arena of (factory) sports could only have had the motive of preparing workers for an upcoming war, functioning to train up the physical abilities of the soon-to-be soldiers. [See, for example, Lorenz Peiffer, “Körperzucht und Körpererziehung im Dritten Reich,” in *Sportstadt Berlin in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Sportmuseum Berlin (Berlin, 1993), 178-191. Peiffer’s article has the clear thesis that sports had for the Nazis first and foremost the function of preparing for an upcoming war.] Unsurprisingly, especially in light of the prevailing “peace-discourse” in pre-war Nazi Germany, KdF publications never mention such a motivation. Instead, they emphasize the general health benefits to be gained by participants in KdF sports offerings.

<sup>342</sup> A report about social events at Borsig illustrates that when it came to “war preparation” through KdF sports, the aspect of community building (through joy) inherent in these activities was more important than its element of physical preparation – for the war effort and the overall stabilization of the regime. “Many comrades of the Factory Sports Community [now] wear the soldierly gown of honor of the German man. To keep in close touch with them is our most beautiful work of comradeship. More than 25,000 postal items have been sent to our comrades by the Factory Sports Community. Our soldiers have answered with approximately 2,500 letters and postcards. Moreover, many visits [by soldiers] on vacation demonstrate the close bond between soldiers and those who have stayed at home. During practice lessons and competitions, our vacationers are continually in our midst. [...] War has given us more than ever the proof that the comradeship of sports is comradeship for life.” (DTMB, I. 2.001. 578, Bericht über das soziale Geschehen im Werk Borsig der Rheinmetall-Borsig Aktengesellschaft,” 30.) Thus, war preparation through sports might have been much more a form of mental training in connection to community building than the exercising and improving of workers’ physiques.

worker-athletes.<sup>343</sup>

KdF's entry into the realm of company sports – its founding of Factory Sports Communities – appears in this light as an attempt to control the activities of former workers sports club members in this sphere. The leisure organization seems to have wanted to forestall this arena's becoming the “new core of a working class sports movement,” as the left hoped and predicted.<sup>344</sup> However, after KdF's involvement in Factory Sports Communities, things did not turn out exactly as the Nazis hoped for. Almost ironically, it appears that now these KdF Factory Sports Communities became the new sites for working-class sports, at least according to records compiled for Sopade: it was through these Factory Sports Communities that former ATSB and Red Sport athletes maintained their contacts and networks.<sup>345,346</sup> These reports are largely supported by a

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<sup>343</sup> Such a fear was partly confirmed by the Sopade, which reported that (pre-KdF) company sports had become a site for working class athletes to continue their (politically oriented) sporting activities. See Hans Joachim Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” in *Arbeiterkultur und Arbeitersport*, ed. Hans Joachim Teichler (Clausthal-Zellerfeld: DVS, 1985), 210.; Teichler states “that company sports (prior to its appropriation by KdF) were used in many places as alternatives and also, at least until 1937, tolerated as such retreat areas for former worker-athletes. Unprompted, seven of the worker-athletes questioned by us [in a survey] pointed this out.” (Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 211.)

<sup>344</sup> Sopade report from 1938; quoted after Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 210.

<sup>345</sup> Cf. Frese et al., *Betriebspolitik im “Dritten Reich”: Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Unternehmer und Staatsbürokratie in der westdeutschen Großindustrie 1933 - 1939*, 403. Frese et al., *Betriebspolitik im “Dritten Reich”: Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Unternehmer und Staatsbürokratie in der westdeutschen Großindustrie 1933 - 1939*, 403, and Hans Joachim Teichler, “‘Wir brauchten einfach den Kontakt zueinander’: Arbeitersport und Arbeitersportler im ‘Dritten Reich’,” in *Illustrierte Geschichte des Arbeitersports*, ed. Hans Joachim Teichler and Gerhard Hauk (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1987), 240. KdF itself knew about these developments; in fact, it had anticipated that its sports activities could be taken over by communist or other groups critical of the Nazi regime, and might consequently function as potential conspiratorial forums. Accordingly, the establishment of KdF Factory Sports Communities was accompanied by a secret instruction from DAF's *Amt Information*: “In consideration of the fact that members of former workers’, as well as of confessional, gymnastic and sports clubs, who had retreated from sports since the dissolution of their clubs at the occasion of the [Nazi] takeover of power [*Machtübernahme*], can now again be included into the Factory Sports Community, KdF's Sports Department has requested the *Amt Information* to help with the creation of Factory Sports Communities by investigating in the future any leader of a Factory Sports Community as well as his co-workers, such as: sports-equipment attendant, gymnasium-attendant, swim-attendant, soccer-attendant, etc. etc., most precisely in regards to their political trustworthiness.” (BArch R 58/944, pag. 31; “Arbeitsanweisung, Betr. Schaffung von Betriebssportgemeinschaften durch die NSG- “Kraft durch Freude,” from the *Amt*

postwar questionnaire survey conducted by Hans Joachim Teichler.<sup>347</sup> About a third of those worker-athletes who continued to do sports during the Third Reich did so using KdF's framework.<sup>348</sup> On the one hand, such behavior could be interpreted as a display of what Alf Lüdtke has described as *Eigen-Sinn*, a term that has been characterized as “stubbornly persistent habits of everyday life through which ordinary people expressed themselves publicly in revolt against established authorities.”<sup>349</sup> KdF's infrastructure offered spaces for that *eigensinning* activity, here in the arena of sports. In Factory Sports Communities, worker-athletes could preserve their previous habits of doing sports, possibly even together with former fellow athletes. Ultimately, however, Teichler's findings also suggest that KdF sports in factories were indeed successful in reaching

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*Information* to its officers in all German *Gaus*, Aug. 13, 1937.)

<sup>346</sup> This use of sports associations and their activities to remain in contact recalls an earlier socialist strategy, which Krüger details in his short overview of the history of German workers in the period of the so-called socialist laws (*Sozialistengesetze*) under Bismarck: “During this time of illegality, these [political, social-democratic] organizations often used the “Red” Turner clubs and the Turner sections of the worker educational clubs (*Arbeiter Bildungsvereine*) to maintain contacts.” (Krüger, “The German Way of Workers Sport,” 3.)

<sup>347</sup> Teichler had asked former working-class sportsmen – i.e. those who had been organized in working-class sports clubs prior to the Third Reich – about their experiences in Nazi Germany. Among other questions, Teichler inquired whether the former worker-athletes were able to continue their sports practices, and if yes, under what circumstances. There were 55 affirmative answers to the first question; ten answered the second question with “through attendance of communal sports classes or KdF courses” while seven people responded “factory sports teams,” probably also referring to KdF initiated activities (Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 199–200.) Teichler remains uncertain about what his findings can tell us about KdF and former worker-athletes: “Do we have to consider it a successful step towards the integration of the working class into the “racial community” (a declared goal of the National Socialist Social Policy) when, for instance, in the airplane factory “Eria Leipzig” – an armament company with several thousand workers – eight to ten soccer teams came together in 1935, which consisted of up to 75% of former worker-club-athletes? Or was this a successful survival strategy and camouflage for the maintenance of old groups of like-thinking people? The evaluation of this issue differs diametrically amongst those questioned by us. It ranges from “joy about being able to secretly carry on” to a mere “Only Sports” (Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 208–209.)

<sup>348</sup> Of course, the percentage might be even higher, since we might suspect that in Teichler's post-war survey, not all (former) leftist workers were willing to admit their participation in Nazi organized sports.

<sup>349</sup> Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim*, 264.



German workers. In fact, as Teichler points out, they did even more: “KdF’s Factory Sports seemed to have played a not insignificant role for the ‘integration’ of former athletes of working class clubs.”<sup>350</sup> With such effects, KdF sports could be blamed for furthering the demise of German working-class sport in Germany; a development that clearly started in the Nazi regime, but continued after 1945.

To make a more definite diagnosis in this respect requires examining more closely what kind of integration of workers athletes occurred when former members of leftist workers sports clubs participated in KdF’s Factory Sports Communities. Towards the beginning of this chapter I observed that two opposed readings of this scenario are possible. The first would be that KdF provided a type of “haven” for those former *Arbeitersportler*, whose socio-cultural (sports) milieus the Nazis had largely destroyed. Alternatively, KdF and its sports activities could be seen to play a dominant role in the destruction of these milieus, as the worker-athletes were moved over to doing sports in non-socialist environments. To shed more light on this, it is important to look more closely at Communist and Socialist workers, especially those organized (in the underground) and their relationship and interplay with the KdF and its sports activities, in factories and beyond. First, in an attempt to win over workers for the leisure organization’s sports in factories, KdF employed, at least in Bavaria, “many former socialists and communists, who were known to be good athletes, as Factory Sports Attendants.”<sup>351</sup> Teichler shows that the involvement of former workers-sports-club

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<sup>350</sup> Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 213. Here, he also adds, in regards to his survey of worker-athletes “It is not out of the question that the small return rate [of questionnaires for the survey] can be explained with the respondents’ continuing sports practices in Nazi sports or in Nazi organizations, whose membership one does not want to admit to today. (Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 213.)

<sup>351</sup> Sopade 1937, 1980, 1262; quoted after Teichler, “Ende des Arbeitersports 1933?,” 211.

athletes was even embraced by those who opposed the Nazi regime. He cites a Communist strategy paper, which, despite its call for workers to fight against the transformation of company sports, generally supported workers' participation in sports activities in their factories, given that "each cent used for sports causes means withdrawing it from the armament effort."<sup>352</sup> Thus, we can see there was a sort of "official" integration of (formerly) positively active workers-athletes, acknowledged and actively fostered by both the Nazi regime and oppositional circles.

But there were also clandestine "resistance" acts from the left against and, most importantly, *through* KdF sports – acts that would could be characterized as *eigensinnig*. Most of these activities aimed disintegrating KdF Factory Communities. Communists, especially, became "undercover" participants in or even organizers of KdF events in order to meet with many German workers in an inconspicuous manner.<sup>353</sup> In other words, members of the (Communist) opposition to the Nazi regime sought to infiltrate KdF by following what they consciously considered a "Trojan Horse" strategy.<sup>354</sup> How this could play out can be seen from the following anecdote from the memoirs of Alfred Nothnagel, a Communist resistance fighter against the Nazis. Nothnagel was put in charge of focusing on the German youth in his region by the outlawed leadership of the Communist Party; he established a youth group, which, "with girls and boys, disguised with leather trousers, colorful shirts and skirts respectively and musical instruments,

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<sup>352</sup> Communist Strategy Paper, originating in Prague, apprehended by the Gestapo (now in: BA R 58/665), quoted after Ibid., 212.

<sup>353</sup> See BArch NS 5 IV/94; "Vortrag über Richtlinien und Praxis der kommunistischen Internationale zur Zersetzung der Betriebsgemeinschaft von Gau-I-Referent Pg. Notter," Jan. 24, 1938.

<sup>354</sup> I am about to discuss the memoirs of Alfred Nothnagel where the term is recollected as officially embraced by the Communist Party in Germany. (BArch SgY 30/2058; memoirs of Alfred Nothnagel.)

undertook trips through the urban hinterland of Leipzig.” To avert the danger of inspections and arrests as a “wild group,” Nothnagel decided to send one participating youth to apply for a KdF-hiking license. This allowed him to mask the group as a KdF-hiking club. It seems as if his plan worked: on several occasions, the KdF license prevented the arrest of members of the group.<sup>355</sup> In other words, Nothnagel used KdF as a cover for an illicit underground Communist youth group.

In addition to providing an example of the Communist’s “Trojan Horse method” in operation, Nothnagel’s memoirs also shed interesting light on the relationship and “interplay” between Communists and German authorities on the ground. Overall, this was something of a cat-and-mouse-game. On one side, Communists tried to infiltrate KdF events or use the leisure organization’s offerings for their own benefit – by, for example, establishing KdF-groups or classes that were simultaneously meetings of Communist workers or other opponents of the Nazi regime. On the other side, however, the Gestapo was very aware of this, as shown above, and eager to shut down these ‘false’ KdF activities. They also tried this to counter-infiltrate these groups. Such an attempt is recounted in an anecdote from K. Scheffler, participant in a (Communist) KdF-sports class organized by Nothnagel and his fellow resistance fighters. His anecdote reveals, however, that the Communists were in fact aware of these infiltration attempts by the Gestapo and that they managed, at least in this case, to fend off the “attack.” Scheffler recounts that, during one of the sports classes, he and his fellow sports men, “all in short

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<sup>355</sup> The Gestapo arrested and questioned members of the group several times (for example, in the fall of 1939), but because they had the necessary papers to prove that they were a KdF sports (hiking) group, they were released again after a short time. In another instance, the group was confronted by a group of Hitler youth boys during a camping outing in the summer of 1939. They stopped bothering Nothnagel’s group, however, when the latter produced their KdF license. (BArch SgY 30/2058; memoirs of Alfred Nothnagel].)

pants and sports shirts” were joined by “a new guy, wearing a trench coat and carrying a briefcase.” Scheffler and his comrades were suspicious and “critically observed [him] during dressing,” and their surveillance “did not miss the police stamp in his sports shoes.” Once the police spy was found out, the group acted quickly:

A short notice to the coach was sufficient, and after the gymnastic part we did not play the usually very popular dodgeball [*Völkerball*,] but hard *Rollball*: Who has the ball can be attacked by everybody. The “new guy” had the ball most of the time and was treated accordingly. He certainly reported back to his [police] office through all of his bruising that we pursue hard, serious sports. No one ever came again. [BArch SgY 30/2058, pag. 153-155; memoirs of Alfred Nothnagel, here reported by K. Scheffler.]

While this anecdote sounds almost comical, there are serious stakes here: even when worker-athletes had covers as (KdF-) groups to do sports among themselves, they were constantly forced to be on their lookout for Gestapo informers amongst them. While in this case they apparently managed to convince the intruder their sports were “serious,” this might not have always been the case. We can see here how KdF’s infrastructure allowed oppositional individual and groups to create somewhat autonomous spaces, where they could sports and be amongst themselves in an *eigensinnig* fashion. These spaces certainly were not uninterrupted by the Nazis, but they were largely removed from the influence of KdF or the regime more generally.

How did the representatives of the Nazi regime reacted to attempts to use KdF spaces autonomously? Surprisingly, their reaction was rather lenient and hands-off overall, suggesting that the activities in these spaces were not (perceived as) threats to KdF or to the Nazi state overall. The Communist Nothnagel had licensed hiking trips as KdF activities in to disguise that these were outings of a socialist group. Similar things occurred in several cases, some of which were found out by the Nazi intelligence

agencies.<sup>356</sup> The first case concerns the hiking club *Bund der Niederdeutschen Heimatwanderer* [League of Low-German Homeland Hikers] from Rostock. In 1936, a female Nazi party member, taking part in a KdF trip, encountered this club and was alarmed by the fact that the Hitler greeting was never used amongst the club members.<sup>357</sup> Together with a member of the Nazi women's organization, she decided to investigate the matter further and began to secretly survey the hiking club:

Very inconspicuously, the two of us watched the group, which consisted of former SAJ and KPD boys, as well as a small contingent from reactionary groups. However, at a meeting with hiking comrades from Schwerin and Wismar, our [Nazi] songs and also the Hitler greeting was used as soon as Party Comrade Lüder, the *Gau* hiking attendant, was present. From a reliable source, I have learned, that at a meeting with hiking comrades from Rathnow on Pentecost 1936, the clenched fist [the socialist greeting] was shown [...] as a farewell [gesture]. [BArch NS 5 IV/ 39; pag. 34; enclosure to letter to the *Amt Information* from Jul. 23, 1936, subject: "Werratalfahrt v. 8.-15.8.1936/ Kreiswanderwart Vg. Adolf Lau, Rostock."]

The woman reported her concern that this KdF group was in fact anti-regime,<sup>358</sup> and both the Gestapo and DAF's *Amt Information* looked further into the matter, to find that the group consisted entirely of Communists.<sup>359</sup> This is another instance of sports and

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<sup>356</sup> The discussed following case are based on source material accumulated by these agencies, such as DAF's *Amt Information* and the Gestapo.

<sup>357</sup> According to her report, only her visible party badge caused the club's hiking attendant to occasionally greet her with "*Heil Hitler*" (BArch NS 5 IV/39; report sent to the *Amt Information* on Jul. 23, 1936.)

<sup>358</sup> As further grounds for her suspicion, she relays two instances she knew of where it was announced that tickets for KdF hikes, which Lau led every other Sunday, were not available anymore, but then later, these tickets were distributed to members and friends of Lau's *Bund Niederdeutscher Heimatwanderer*. (See BArch NS 5 IV/ 39, pag. 35; enclosure to letter to the *Amt Information* from Jul. 23, 1936, subject: Werratalfahrt v. 8.-15.8.1936/ Kreiswanderwart Vg. Adolf Lau, Rostock.)

<sup>359</sup> For a KdF hiking trip in August 1936, it was determined that all 19 members of the hiking group coming from Rostock had Marxist or Communist backgrounds, including their leader, Adolf Tischler, who had founded the *Bund Niederdeutscher Heimatwanderer, Rostock* in September of 1934; some of the group's Sunday hikes included trips to a spa owned by a "former" Marxist. (See BA NS 5 IV/39, pag. 18; "Ermittlungsbericht über die 'KdF'-Fahrt nach Eschwege vom 8.8. -15.8. 36, Betr. Bund Niederdeutscher Heimatwanderer," Aug. 22, 1936). Despite these findings the local police abstained from intervening against the group, since it considered that the association's members now had an affirmative attitude toward the Nazi state [*staatsbejahend*] (See BA NS 5 IV/39, pag. 5, "Schreiben der DAF, Gauleitung

athletics (here: hiking<sup>360</sup>) being continued in a setting similar to that of the pre-Nazi era: The *Bund Niederdeutscher Heimatwanderer, Rostock* had been, according to police reports, founded in 1934 to permit the “continuation of previously existing hiking clubs” made up of members from leftist backgrounds.<sup>361</sup> It is important to note about this group that, while it was known to the authorities that the association’s members were not committed Nazis, this had no consequences. Not even the Gestapo seems to have assumed that the group abused KdF activities as platforms for oppositional political work against the Nazi regime. In other words, “camouflage-KdF” activities might have been “resistive” in the sense that they allowed gatherings of those who were unified in their leftist and anti-Nazi beliefs, but they did not necessarily lead to actual anti-regime activities or even any “political” practices. The takeover of KdF classes by oppositional individuals and groups did not in fact represent any real threat to the KdF as an organization or to the Third Reich overall.<sup>362</sup>

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Mecklenburg-Lübeck an das Amt Information, Apr. 24.4. 1937”) The *Amt Information* seems unconvinced and announces further surveillance of the group. The file, however, does not include any information about additional findings of the investigators or any consequential (penal) actions.

<sup>360</sup> On KdF’s hiking activities, see John A Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), 99–104.

<sup>361</sup> BA NS 5 IV/39, pag. 18, “Ermittlungsbericht über die ‘KdF’-Fahrt nach Eschwege vom 8.8. -15.8. 36, Betr. Bund Niederdeutscher Heimatwanderer,” Aug. 22, 1936.

<sup>362</sup> This can also be seen from the following case, concerning the KdF Folk-Dance-Circle “*Lindengarten*” in Guben, Saxony, led by dance instructor Erich Meister. Meister used to be active in the *Sozialistische Arbeiter Jugend* (SAJ; Socialist Workers Youth), had received his education as a dance instructor from the Social Democratic Party and was the leader of a proletarian Folk dance circle prior to 1933. (BArch R 58/ 316, pag. 29, 32f.; letter exchange deals with the case of former SAJ-leader Erich Meister, leader of KdF’s Folk Dance circle “*Lindengarten*.”) An investigation including surveillance of Meister’s dance group determined that it presented no immediate threat. Meister appeared to be “hardly in the position to unfold any kind of political activity during his dance classes.” However, the investigators saw a general trend that KdF (dance) classes in this district would become a haven for those worker-athletes, who were, while maybe politically inactive, latently regime-critical; they thus recommended introducing girls and boys from Nazi groups into these KdF dance classes. These were then to “educate the participants coming from previously Marxist milieus into National Socialists;” and so fight against “the dance circle [becoming] just an opportunity for those meeting up regularly to build a group of members from the previously Marxist

Importantly, we can also see that KdF's organizational frameworks allowed the regime to "tame" or indeed take over groups with originally anti-Nazi attitudes. One example is a Folk Dance group from Brunswick, led by a former Social Democratic activist, Franz Bosse, a known enemy of the regime.<sup>363</sup> Initially, this group was merely associated with KdF. Later the leisure organization planned to fully absorb the group, but this was criticized by the Gestapo, both on the local level and in Berlin. There were "grave reservations against a complete takeover of a tightly integrated group that is made up of two-thirds former Marxists." The Gestapo argued that "according to [its] experience, the cohesion among these people is very high and will continue to exist after the takeover into [...] KdF and will additionally favor ambitions towards disintegration within this organization."<sup>364</sup> Interestingly, however, the local KdF branch in Brunswick was untroubled by this warning, and the Folk Dance group in question was indeed taken over by the leisure organization. All of its former members were made owners of KdF's annual sports tickets and now took part in a weekly KdF dance class, which was led by Brunswick's district KdF sports attendant and teachers from a Nazi-run Folk dance circle. This was an open sports class, which everybody could enter any time and which was led by Nazi party members; accordingly, the KdF office in Brunswick was confident that "difficulties will not arise in the future."<sup>365</sup> These KdF organizers were very confident in

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youth organization." (BArch R 58/ 316, pag. 37 f.; report from Dec. 23, 1936, subject: "Volkstanzkreis 215 Guben.")

<sup>363</sup> In 1933, Bosse had been imprisoned for two months in 1933 for the possession of illegal communist publications. (BArch R58/ 316, pag. 44; letter from May 20, 1937.)

<sup>364</sup> BArch R58/ 316, pag. 44; letter from May 20, 1937.

<sup>365</sup> Such disobedience is an interesting example of how KdF's inner-workings are characterized by "polycratic governance, thus mirroring practices that have been found for the rule of the Nazi state overall.

the powers of their activities.

It might be true that such procedures – “incorporating” former socialist worker-athletes, even as entire groups, into open KdF classes – would not lead to further “difficulties,” such as continued political work like that the sports clubs had previously enabled on the part of athletes. However, this does not mean that this practice, of course, would necessarily successfully promote the desired education of “participants coming from previously Marxist milieus into National Socialists.”<sup>366</sup> Instead, KdF open classes could function as ‘homes’ for former workers-athletes, even if these classes were not initiated or led by anti-Nazi oppositional figures:

During a KdF swimming class, in which over 50 women participated, I had to realize that matters were barely [Nazi] party driven [*wenig parteimäßig*]. Throughout, all participants were simple folks. One hardly ever hears a “*Heil Hitler*,” and we, who were previously in working class sports clubs, felt at home, so to speak. I first had concerns about participating in a KdF-event, but there’s no other option left for us. Thus, I was even more positively surprised to find nothing National Socialist about this class’s content and execution. [Sopade, Jul. 1936, 884.]

The woman speaking here emphasizes that, even if opposed to the regime, many workers had no opportunity other than joining KdF classes to continue their sports activities.<sup>367</sup> This “giving in” is reported by many leftist observers; most likely, these occurrences would have been more the rule than the exception. In addition to being able to continue to do sports, many worker-athletes opened up to KdF offerings in an attempt to “save” and “conserve” sports facilities that had been available to them before 1933’s ban of Germany’s leftist parties and their affiliated associations.

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<sup>366</sup> BArch R 58/ 316, pag. 37 f.; report from Dec. 23, 1936, subject: “Volkstanzkreis 215 Guben.”

<sup>367</sup> Later in her report, she adds: “The fact of the matter is, that one cannot avoid KdF if one wants to do sports or go on vacation, and this is rather universal.” In other words, and again, many people joined KdF because there was no other option left. (Sopade, Jul. 1936, 884.)



This perspective suggests that KdF's choice to incorporate former workers and socialist sports groups was equally an opportunistic move on the part of these groups to preserve themselves and their facilities. But this opportunity was not without its costs. We see this logic in a 1934 report from the socialist group *Neu Beginnen*, discussing such a case in the Upper Lusatia region. Before 1933, the *Arbeiter-Turn- und Sportbund* (ATSB, or Workers' Gymnastics and Sports Federation) had been strong in this region. In 1934, one year after the association's forced dissolution, its gyms were abandoned and empty, its exercise fields going to seed, according to the report. Apparently, the former worker-athletes had a hard time witnessing and accepting this situation. Consequently, they started to participate in Nazi-organized sports offerings, such as KdF sports classes.

The *Neu Beginnen* report describes this development as follows:

There are more and more cases in which workers start to inject fresh blood into fascist cultural organizations. For example, it was said that the sports home, built by workers, should not be lost; it would be better to join the Nazi organization and in that way at least rescue equipment, the home etc, which had been acquired out of the funds of workers. [...] This is spearheaded by former [...] worker-athletes. One assumes that this will be very visible to the public during the Olympic Games in 1936. Some of the workers thus begin to resign themselves to the new power and so fall gradually under the influence of fascist trains of thought. [Bernd Stöver, *Berichte über die Lage in Deutschland: Die Lagemeldungen der Gruppe Neu Beginnen aus dem Dritten Reich 1933-1936* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996), 327f.]<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> = "Bericht über die Lage in Deutschland, Nr. 10, Oct./ Nov.1934." The report also mentions that a similar development can be witnessed among former worker singers and in singing associations. For discussions of such "strategies" on the parts of both worker-athletes and singers within the overall context of the Third Reich (i.e. not only for KdF), see Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Sozialistische Milieugruppen nach 1933. Strategien der Anpassung und der Verweigerung am Beispiel der Arbeitersportler und Arbeitersänger," in *Anpassung, Verweigerung, Widerstand: Soziale Milieus, politische Kultur und der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland im regionalen Vergleich*, by Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (Berlin, 1997), 123-143. According to Schmiechen-Ackermann, socialist milieus in Germany were destroyed through a Nazi assault that occurred in three phases: "first, in [...] the immediate takeover of power in the Spring and Summer of 1933, then through increased persecution after 1937 and, finally, through the radicalization of Nazi rule during the war. For the period from Fall 1933 until 1936, there was a phase of relative peace, during which the still existing oppositional circles were able to maintain spaces in niches of the system." (Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, "Sozialistische Milieugruppen nach 1933. Strategien der Anpassung und der Verweigerung am Beispiel der Arbeitersportler und Arbeitersänger," 136-137.) Schmiechen-Ackermann addresses sports for workers in this context, but not KdF specifically.

The workers may not have moved to KdF for the sake of KdF or Nazism, but once within the KdF organization the socialist side of their sports activities could not help but fade. In light of such sources, then, it is certainly arguable that KdF's activities in the realm of (factory) sports enabled the further, perhaps final, destruction of socialist milieus in Nazi Germany. There was certainly an ongoing, underlying ambition on the part of the Nazi regime to achieve this, or at least some sort of appeasement between the Nazi regime and the German working class, through KdF and its efforts in the area of sports.<sup>369</sup>

These activities always built on – and often exploited – companies' pre-existing sports institutions, activities and personnel. This process was not free of resistance on the part of the companies, but eventually, they had to give in to the demands of KdF's sports department. This acceptance and "giving in," however, was often accompanied by a struggle to retain as much independence as possible after the initial KdF 'take over.' This was true not only for companies and their sports associations, but also for workers, especially those who were (formerly) organized, in the sphere of sports or, more generally, in Nazi-opposing groups or associations. These workers sought to use KdF sports for their own purposes, employing it in their resistant activities directed against the Nazi regime. In fact, we can see *eigensinnig* attempts to re-design KdF's classes into autonomous spaces for oppositional minded individuals and groups.

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<sup>369</sup> On the evidence of sources such as these, it seems plausible that many of the workers involved in these sports group were more committed to sports, so to speak, than to the ideology or politics of their socialist milieus. When the groups transfer to the KdF, the worker-athletes are following the sports and sports facilities and not necessarily thinking of how their political milieu will change. This seems consonant with my overall claim that KdF was about "fun" – in this case, sport – and not politics. Perhaps the workers would have been less willing to become explicitly Nazi just to pursue their sport, but equally, perhaps their initial 'socialism' was more that of the milieu than of the individual for many worker-athletes, so just as KdF was providing fun, not forming the worker-athletes according to Nazi ideology, maybe their initial socialism was also about the opportunity for sport (and fun) than deeply held politics. (Clearly, however, the examples I have discussed also bring out that at least some worker sports groups did retain their socialist leanings.)

However, both authorities and KdF were aware of this and were not particularly worried about these “Trojan Horse” advances. It appears that they were justified in their unconcern: even KdF sports activities which were run or mainly frequented by Nazi-oppositional workers, – or those who had been previously organized in socialist (sports) clubs – could offer not much more than sports. Maybe, these sports classes allowed these individuals to meet. But, nevertheless, these meetings appear to have remained, for the most part, sports activities. Politics was mostly absent.<sup>370</sup> If there were “resistance activities,” they were hardly radical. It seems that often all energies were invested in keeping up a safe façade to avoid discovery of the “oppositional” groups. And generally, sports – and having the ability to continue to do sports with similar-minded people – was the main goal, not active fighting against the regime and its organization, KdF.

KdF assisted the stabilization of the regime simply by occupying oppositional-minded workers through participation in its sports classes. KdF’s own rather distant position from (Nazi) political content was probably helpful in this regard. Furthermore, there is no reason to assume that the “joy” aspect of (KdF) sports did not also function for these (potentially oppositional) workers, who joined KdF sports classes because they had no other options or planned to “use” KdF for their political or social purposes. Also, the workers’ “giving in” – which occurred quite frequently – arguably led to the end of *Arbeitersport* in Germany.

“Integrating” oppositional workers through sports in factories and the latter’s community-building elements was one aspect of KdF’s larger goal to create a unified

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<sup>370</sup> Maybe this happened entirely for, say, pragmatic ‘security reasons,’ and not an actual wish to avoid politics, but the outcome was nevertheless apolitical sports.

*Volksgemeinschaft*. Furthermore, KdF sports activities intended to strengthen this “racial community” by physically strengthening each individual through sports and physical activities. Preparation for war was related to this, but, as I have shown, this was not the main goal of KdF sports in factories; militarism does not accurately describe its entire character. Indeed, purely militarized, sober disciplinary activities would probably not have generated a steady following for KdF factory sports, which were, after all, voluntary. KdF Factory Sports Communities, like KdF sports in general, emphasized “joy production” in its activities. Sports were meant to make workers content and happy – and would work in this manner as a stabilizing force for the regime.

CHAPTER FOUR  
Beautiful Villages, Happy Peasants:  
*Kraft durch Freude's* Programs for the German Countryside

Peaceful landscapes, home to small, picturesque German villages full of ancient timber-framed houses. Hard-working, yet content and healthy-looking German peasants, mostly wearing traditional garb. A feeling of oneness with nature, everything far removed from modern civilization and its discontents: we encounter these postcard-like images and corresponding notions in a KdF book dealing with the leisure organization's work in Germany's countryside.<sup>371</sup> Leafing through the book, statements such as "The value of a healthy peasantry for a people is irreplaceable.[...] For the peasant and the rural worker, there shall be a re-awakening and strengthening of their pride and joy, of a feeling of security in their home villages through cheerful hours and ceremonies," and "It is imperative that we let the peasantry find and search for its own strength" provide us, along with the imagery, with a first impression of about the direction of KdF's engagement in rural Germany.<sup>372</sup> The leisure organization was – at least partially – involved in a project of making Germany's countryside fit to specific agrarian-romantic ideas inherent in Nazi ideology.

Because KdF was a sub-department of the German Workers Front its main focus was on Germany's working class. This, however, did not mean that it did not also try to reach Germany's rural population, including workers who lived in the countryside and

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<sup>371</sup> See Wolfgang Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes* (Berlin: DAF, 1939), 6, 9–11, 21–24, 41–42, 59–60.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 13–14 and 17.

farmers and their families. Indeed, this was necessary given KdF's underlying goal of creating and fostering a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*, embracing all strata and regions of the German Reich. However, the project to bring "Strength through Joy" to the German countryside faced particular challenges, deriving from larger issues of politics, economics, and ideology. Accordingly, in the eyes of KdF, transferring urban activities *in toto* into the villages was not feasible. Instead, the organization attempted, at least partly, to adapt to "special" requirements in the countryside.

An investigation of KdF's program allows us to enhance our understanding KdF's overall outlook. Its program for the countryside can be seen, to an extent, as an exceptional case that clarifies the – sometimes rather different – outlines of KdF's work in urban settings.

One element of KdF's overall mission that becomes clear through an analysis of KdF's plans for the countryside is its effort to connect leisure activities to a 'civilizing' mission. This chapter uncovers the intrusive character of the organization's activities in German villages as it aimed to shape the private environment of Germans and their lives according to National Socialist ideas, especially "blood and soil." This commitment to – and open avowal of – Nazi ideas and their promotion is another way in which KdF's work in rural Germany diverged from that for the urban working class. In fact, while 'civilizing' efforts can be found in both areas, the strong and open Nazi "politicalization" of leisure was unique to KdF's work in the countryside.

In other aspects, an analysis of KdF's rural activities confirms themes previously discussed: beginning with its specific activities, which were generally 'imported' from the urban to the rural setting, (albeit in an adapted manner, as discussed below), to its

emphasis on amateurism, activity, cleanliness and, above all, the building of community. It is important, to clarify, however, that most of the analysis of this chapter is concerned with what KdF wanted, rather than what it in fact did, or how it was received. Partly, this has to do with the availability of sources, but the main reason is that the greatest divergence from the previously discussed work appears on this level of KdF's 'desires,' and so this is what is most important to explore.<sup>373</sup>

It is also important that KdF was not in fact a coherent body, but acted quite differently in diverse settings. Much of its work could be influenced by external factors, voices, and discourses. In the countryside, these were especially the problem of the "flight from the land," the "blood and soil ideology," and the circles around Richard Walter Darré, the *Reichsbauernführer* [Reichs Leader of Peasants.] A brief consideration of the state and position of agriculture in the Third Reich and the relationship between the countryside and the Nazi government is necessary to put KdF's work in its proper perspective. Generally, this relationship produced few conflicts, at least compared to that between the regime and KdF's main constituency, the German working class. There was much less opposition towards the Nazi government amongst German peasants, and less fear of such (potential) opposition within the regime. As a matter of fact, as Albrecht Ritschl and Gustavo Corni point out, a Nazi takeover of the agrarian sector, at least in terms of its political administration at a local level, had already taken place *before* 1933. This prepared the ground so that once the Nazi government was in charge nationally, "the National Socialist principle of penetration of all sectors of society and life from top to

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<sup>373</sup> Of course, given this focus, rural inhabitants and their agency will be underrepresented in this chapter. I do not mean to imply, however, that these villagers were apolitical individuals who simply accepted what KdF did and wanted. In fact, while this chapter cannot explore this area in more detail, some evidence presented below suggests that there was no such general embrace of KdF's work.

bottom” was introduced quickly and without much resistance into the German countryside.<sup>374</sup> The villages’ everyday life with its local clubs and associations was gradually penetrated and a “permanent takeover” by Nazism eventually occurred, as Caroline Wagner found in her study of the Nazi conquest of the German province<sup>375</sup> – and as this chapter will show that the leisure organization’s work played an important part in this process.

Nazi agrarian politics was greatly influenced by ideology of Richard Walther Darré.<sup>376</sup> According to Darré, the German peasantry constituted the racial core of the German nation. Consequently, he believed that the fate of Germany and its peasantry were inextricably linked, arguing that a weakening or destruction of the German agricultural class would eventually and inevitably lead to Germany’s overall demise. This also meant that any racial renewal – and Darré deemed that such a process was necessary

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<sup>374</sup> Albert Ritschl, “Wirtschaftspolitik im Dritten Reich – Ein Überblick,” in *Deutschland 1933-1945. Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft*, ed. Karl Dietrich Bracher, Manfred Funke, and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1992), 123. Cf. also Gustavo Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants: Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930-1939* (New York: Berg, 1990).

<sup>375</sup> Caroline Wagner, *Die NSDAP auf dem Dorf: Eine Sozialgeschichte der NS-Machtergreifung in Lippe* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1998), 257.

<sup>376</sup> Darré (1895-1953) embraced ideas of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century *völkisch* movement and theories about the superiority of a Nordic race. His two books, *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der nordischen Rasse* (*Peasantry as the life-source of the Nordic Race*, 1929) and *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (*New Nobility from Blood and Soil*, 1930), became founding texts of the Nazi “*Blut und Boden*” (blood and soil) ideology. Darré joined the Nazi party in 1930. He was in charge of the party’s agrarian policy, and it was due in large part to his propagandistic campaigns, that the party managed to secure the votes of a majority of the rural electorate. (For a case study on the Nazi “seizure of power” in rural Germany, see Zdenek Zofka, *Die Ausbreitung des Nationalsozialismus auf dem Lande: Eine regionale Fallstudie zur politischen Einstellung der Landbevölkerung in der Zeit des Aufstiegs und der Machtergreifung der NSDAP* (Munich: Kommissionsbuchhandlung R. Wölfe, 1979). In 1933, Darré became *Reichsbauernführer* (Reich leader of peasants) and Minister for Agriculture. Once in office, “Darré got down to implementing his ideology of ‘blood and soil’ and making it one of the pillars of the Third Reich.” (Gustavo Corni, “Richard Walter Darré: The Blood and Soil Ideologue,” in *The Nazi Elite*, ed. Ronald Smelser and Rainer Zittelmann (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 21.) Over the years, however, he lost more and more of his power, especially since his policies turned out to reduce the efficiency of agricultural output, and he was forced to surrender his office in 1942. (See Ritschl, “Wirtschaftspolitik im Dritten Reich,” 127.)



– would have to be realized through the German peasantry. “The center of the race question is rooted in the German peasantry,” he argued in 1929, and “you can only save your race if you lead it back to the soil it grew from.”<sup>377</sup> This ideology championed by Darré is usually referred to as “blood and soil.”<sup>378</sup>

KdF furthered the Nazis’ “blood and soil” agenda in the German countryside. Many of the activities offered by the leisure organization aimed at disseminating the values of this ideology. In fact, an analysis of its work reveals a quite literal occupation with both the “blood” of the German rural inhabitants, i.e. through attempts to improve their physical and mental well being, and the “soil” of the German villages, through, for example, interventions aimed at “beautifying” the rural landscape. These activities can be located along trajectories defined in terms of “person”/ “place” axes, that is their engagement with the “village as people” and with the “village as place.” This might also

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<sup>377</sup> Letter from Darré to Edgar Jung from March 4, 1928; quoted after Gustavo Corni and Horst Gies, *Blut und Boden : Rassenideologie und Agrarpolitik im Staat Hitlers* (Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner, 1994), 68.

<sup>378</sup> On Darré's blood and soil ideology, see Clifford R. Lovin, “Blut Und Boden: The Ideological Basis of the Nazi Agricultural Program,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28, no. 2 (June 1967): 279–288. For a more general treatment of the term, and its history before and after Nazi Germany, see Anna Bramwell, “Blut und Boden,” in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, ed. Etienne Francois and Hagen Schulze, vol. 3 (Munich: Beck, 2001), 380–391. Of course, Darré and his fellow blood and soil ideologues were not unique in making such a connection between the fate of a nation and its peasantry. Nationalist discourses which celebrated the rural people and folk culture and dreamed about a return to the land had been prevalent in Europe since the Romantic era of the 18th century and can be traced back to thinkers such as Rousseau and Herder, as can the fear that civilization is a threat to primordial values which are only to be found persisting in the rural sphere. In the Twentieth Century's interwar period they became very prominent in Europe, as Mark Mazower points out: “[...] a deep-rooted ambivalence could be encountered across Europe about the social and biological consequences of urbanization. [...] as the political outlook in Europe darkened, this public love affair with an idealized countryside intensified. Across the continent, the modernist idiom of the 1920s [...] gave way in the arts to a more nationalist concern with the organic and with life close to nature. Rationalism was replaced by an emphasis on the instinctual, individualism by the tribal and communal life, the brain by the body.” Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (Vintage, 2000), 92–94. Being part of a broader trend, Darré's version of this general motif, however, acquired its uniqueness and violent viciousness by being linked to a biological racism. This assumed German-Aryan superiority, which needed to be realized through the extermination of others and through expansion into new living spaces – giving the German “blood” more “soil” to prosper in and rule over. For a more detailed discussion on how the Nazi blood and soil ideology set the ground for the regime's genocidal mass killings, see Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

be described as an “internal”/“external” differentiation. We can see here KdF’s “holistic” approach: it wanted to shape or form Germans both internal and externally. To look at the “personal” or “internal” aspect, I will first analyze the KdF activities aimed at the rural population’s bodies and personalities, i.e. offerings for both their physical and mental ‘improvement’: village evenings, cultural events and sport offerings. Then I turn to the so-called “Village Books” introduced by KdF. These can be understood as being occupied equally with both “person” and “place” concerns. They represent KdF’s attempt to link the peasants “spiritually” to their space of their village and its history and future. I will then analyze KdF’s “external” activities concerned with “place”, the so-called “beautification programs,” which directly aimed at (re-)forming the German countryside, i.e. its “soil.” Emerging from all this is a picture of a leisure organization which was engaged, through micro-management and highly invasive practices, in a “civilizing” effort towards the countryside and its population.

Officially, KdF did not start its work in the countryside until 1937.<sup>379</sup> Its activity had been initiated by a decree by Darré on March 13 of that year, followed by a directive which KdF’s head Robert Ley issued five days later, on March 18, ordering that each *Gau*’s KdF was to assign one of their employees to the *Sonderaufgabe Landbetreuung* [special task of taking care of the countryside]. Furthermore, the leisure organizations’ *Gau* offices were to contact the so-called “*Landesbauernführer*,” the Nazi functionaries in the area of farming and peasantry, or their deputies. Administratively, KdF’s work in

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<sup>379</sup> This, however, does not mean that there was no activity through KdF, or at least through some of its departments, prior to this official starting point. In fact, as we will see on the following page, KdF’s Institute of the Education of the People had been active in organizing Village evenings at least since 1935. This speaks to the polycratic character of Nazi Germany, which also seems to have been “realized” within the leisure organization. Regional differentiations and competition between KdF’s sub-departments led to non-linear, parallel chronologies.

the countryside became part of the responsibilities of its Leisure Time Department.

One of the first activities of KdF in the countryside was the arrangement of *Dorfgemeinschaftsabende* [Village Community Evenings;] according to Ley, they were an appropriate tool “to carry the thought of ‘Strength through Joy’ into the countryside.”<sup>380</sup> Let us thus start with an analysis of these events. This will uncover how here KdF’s work in rural Germany fit in with the organization’s overall goals, but also it where it diverged from what I have described before for such social evenings in the urban setting.

In the countryside, just as in other areas where it operated, KdF’s work was driven by a concern with the building and solidification of community, in order to work towards forming an undivided German *Volksgemeinschaft*. A prerequisite for such a nationwide social unification was high cohesion among the rural population, and KdF sought to achieve this. *Dorfgemeinschaftsabende* were considered especially useful in this regard, since they would “widen the circle of community beyond the single home and the neighborhood,” allowing not only segments and cliques but the entire village population to be brought together. Once the village community was re-established, KdF organizers hoped that the evenings could then serve as a reminder to the whole village community of its participation in the “life struggle of the German people.” Since the fate of the German people overall and that of the village populations in particular were considered to be inextricably linked, the creation of a “community of will” in the village,

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<sup>380</sup> BArch NS 22/ 782; directive by Robert Ley from Mar. 18, 1937. KdF’s organizing of “*Dorfgemeinschaftsabende*” in each rural district was ordered directly by Robert Ley for the first month of the organization’s program, i.e. April 1937. For April 1937, Ley also announced a 2-3 day workshop for KdF organizers active in the rural areas, in which aims and procedures of KdF’s work in the countryside would be further explained.

achieved through these Village Evenings, was deemed essential for the Third Reich as a whole.<sup>381</sup>

Thus, an analysis of the goals KdF had for its Village Evenings uncovers again the leisure organization's goal to build community. In this sense, rural work did not differ much from its urban activities. However, the contents of these evenings were to be different from those described for the urban settings in the previous chapters – KdF organizers made a special effort to exclude “excessively urban” elements from the design of these events, focusing instead on the presentation and practice of traditional, *völkisch* contents. Overall, there was less “entertainment” and more “education” during the *Dorfgemeinschaftsabende* compared to urban social evenings. One possible explanation for such divergence from the ‘urban formula’ could be the fact that the Village Evenings, at least prior to 1937, were not organized by KdF's Leisure Time Department, but instead arranged by KdF's educational branch, the *Volksbildungswerk*.<sup>382</sup> However, this orientation was also grounded in different general assumptions KdF had about both urban and rural audiences, and how this influenced its activities in these two realms. In fact, we can see here, quasi *ex negativo*, how much a concern about a possible negative impact of politics and ideology on the urban working classes affected the outlook of KdF's work for these audiences

So, what did KdF have in mind for the arrangement of Village Community

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<sup>381</sup> Ludwig Caps, “Der Dorfgemeinschaftsabend: Unser Volk im Lebenskampf des deutschen Volkes,” in *Dorfbuch und Dorfabende im Kriege*, ed. Hans Lorenzen (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1940), 9ff.

<sup>382</sup>The *Volksbildungswerk*, a sub-department of KdF, was active in German villages before KdF as an organization had officially started its work there. In 1937, KdF, through its Leisure Department, was officially put in charge of organizing rural leisure, including Village Evenings, i.e. taking over from the *Volksbildungswerk*. (See also footnote 8.)

Evenings? According to 1935 guidelines released by the Institute for the Education of German People, the evenings were to be primarily solemn in character: they should be ceremonies rather than casual parties. Overall, nine Village Evenings per year were envisioned, six in the winter season and three in the busier summer season; all inhabitants of the village would attend. Each evening should have a specific theme – either spiritual or political –, and the *Volksbildungswerk* proposed that it should be opened by a speech given by a local authority, followed by a song sung together by all attendees. The evening's theme should then be addressed in a lecture of twenty to twenty-five minutes length. This educational talk would be the center point of the evening, framed by performances by local folk groups, including musical pieces, choir-singing, recitals, folk dance, folk plays etc. All performers should be native to the village, while the speaker would be chosen by the local (county or district) educational office of the Nazi party. The evening should be concluded with a collective “*Heil*” to the Führer and the collective singing of a verse each of both the German national anthem and the *Horst-Wessel-Lied*, the Nazi party's anthem.

The design of these evenings was rather politicized. There was, furthermore, a certain degree of active concern that such content was indeed realized; according to the 1935 guidelines, the program for each village evening had to be approved by the *Volksbildungswerk* representative on the *Kreis* [county] level before the event. Smoking and drinking alcohol at these events was forbidden, in order to keep up the “character of a ceremony.” Apparently, the organizers were afraid that their educational events could devolve into riotous drinking parties. For the same reason, dancing after the conclusion of the official program was not allowed. Such regulations indicate that KdF assumed that an

appropriately civilized state of the German peasants was not a given. Here, we can discern a clear difference compared to the celebratory tone KdF propaganda frequently adopted when referring to the German peasantry. It seems as if KdF organizers believed that their abstract ideals about the character of the German rural population were not yet in fact a reality, and that they saw it as their task to reconcile this discrepancy. This displays clearly how the leisure organization's work was part of a broader civilizing effort.

In the German countryside, this civilizing project was always linked to the dissemination of the Nazi ideology of "blood and soil." In this context, a Village Community Evening should be an "hour of interior, spiritual edification" for the working population of the countryside, bringing them together as a "community fatefully linked with the soil and *Volk*." Thus, KdF aimed to evoke and fortify patriotism, and to familiarize the rural population, perceived as uneducated, with both Nazi ideology and Germany's history and cultural riches.<sup>383</sup> Generally, in line with KdF's overall programmatic aims, Village Evenings were to have a strengthening function for the participants, in particular with regards to their *völkisch* feelings: "The peasant must feel stronger after a community evening. He must acquire again the experience of the ancient, and yet always new, knowledge about the inexhaustible force of mother earth and of his *Volk*."<sup>384</sup>

It is doubtful whether the *Volksbildungswerk* was able to draw large audiences in the villages with such a solemn and sober program which focused so much on education.

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<sup>383</sup> "Richtlinien für die Volksbildungsarbeit auf dem Lande" from March 25, 1935 (BArch NS 22/ 755).

<sup>384</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 20.

The aforementioned guidelines are from 1935. While later proposals for Village Evenings often did not differ significantly, they abbreviated or even eliminated the political lecture.<sup>385</sup> In 1937, when the KdF's Leisure Time Department became the official initiator for Village Evenings, taking over from the *Volksbildungswerk*,<sup>386</sup> there seems to have been a shift towards a stronger focus on entertainment during these events. For example, in a 1939 KdF book, the goal of the *Dorfgemeinschaftsabend* was "to relax the people from the sorrows and toil of work, to make them happy, to lead them together within the community."<sup>387</sup> This book did not mention any longer any direct political goals, even though the book was directed at KdF organizers and not potential Village Evening participants. Instead, this publication went to great length to describe several games – including the interesting examples of *Ohrfeigenpartie* [game of cuffing ears,] *Stockstechen* [stabbing of sticks] and charades<sup>388</sup> – and songs suitable for a "cheerful village community evening."<sup>389</sup> In other words, on the level of goals, it could be suggested that there was a shift from political education to more 'joy'.<sup>390</sup>

However, despite such later emphasis on "joy," Nazi ideology and its

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<sup>385</sup> See Wolfgang Hirschfeld, *Volkstumsarbeit im Betrieb* (Berlin: DAF, 1939), 92f. and Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 92f.

<sup>386</sup> On this, see footnotes 11 and 8.

<sup>387</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 20.

<sup>388</sup> The illustration used to explain charades is curiously, of all the imaginable words, "liberalism." The text proposed acting out the German term "*Liberalismus*" using three images: "*Lieber*" (dear), "*Aal*" (eel) and "*Is Mus*" (literally "is squish," meaning is worthless/stupid.)

<sup>389</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 93. Among the suggested songs, an interesting choice is the traditional tune "Die Gedanken sind frei" ("Thoughts are free"), a song celebrating the freedom of thought. Another suggested folk song, "Froh zu sein bedarf es wenig" ("It does not need much to be happy"), could be understood as a theme song for *Kraft durch Freude*.

<sup>390</sup> Of course, it is important to clarify that this shift, like of all what has been described above, remains on the level of what KdF wanted not what it did.

dissemination was never entirely abandoned in the arrangement of a *Dorfgemeinschaftsabend*. While KdF suggested that the venue of a Village Evening should be “simple and without kitsch” – meaning that the organizers should abstain from using “paper chains and swastika flags” as decoration, since that would be “too cute,” but a “painting or a well-done bust” of Adolf Hitler should nonetheless definitely be present.<sup>391</sup> Here, we see an additional feature of KdF’s work as it emerges from an analysis of its activities in the countryside: KdF’s rather intrusive and meticulous tendency to micro-manage events and circumstances in the countryside through the establishment of very clear and strict guidelines. Such detail and apparent caution can be identified in all areas of KdF’s work in German villages. The leisure organization’s publications include extremely comprehensive suggestions for its cultural work in rural Germany, including for example extensive lists of songs and dances, or appropriate theater pieces that could be performed by the villagers. To an extent, of course, this impression of “overregulation” stems from the fact that we are looking at regulations – again, the analysis here examines what KdF wanted, and does not explore KdF’s actual doings. However, it appears also that KdF in the countryside was indeed more ‘bold’ in ascribing certain ideals, and admitting to this openly, than we saw in its ways of organizing leisure activities in factories in Chapter two and three. This might have to do with the fact that KdF saw less necessity to be restrained about this than in the urban context. On the flip side, it does of course also suggest the urgency of the ‘civilizatory need’ of the countryside’s population detected by KdF.

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<sup>391</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 89.





***Dorfgemeinschaftsabend:***

Fig. 4.1 Village Evening with Amateur Theater; date and location unknown. (Hirschfeld, *Betreuung des Dorfes*, 91.)

Note that many people in the audience wear traditional (possibly Bavarian?) costumes. The site appears to be the hall of a village inn; the rear wall is ornamented with honorary panels of the local (traditional) shooting club. A harvest wreath, symbol of the peasant life, hangs in the center of the room.

The photograph above, taken from a KdF publication, appears to display such a theater performance at a Village Evening, as described in detail in publications by the organization. In line with the leisure organization's overall belief that entertainment should have, wherever possible, an active component, KdF organizers especially preferred amateur plays for the countryside. Amateur acting was also thought to have a 'enlightening' function for the rural population: "When peasants perform as lay actors, then we can feel their searching, wrestling and fighting for clarity regarding cultural, political, ideological and social questions."<sup>392</sup> Of course, in addition to such programmatic hopes, there was also a more pragmatic reason for KdF organizers to embrace amateur plays. This has to do with the plays' practicability and their advantage of being rather cheap in comparison to professionally staged performances. Quite similar economic and practical concerns also led KdF to make an effort to popularize puppetry in the countryside.<sup>393</sup> We can see here how in several regards, KdF's work in the

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 85f.

<sup>393</sup> It seems, however, that this endeavor was not very successful. (See Ibid., 161. For information on (the non-enthusiastic) reception of puppetry shows, see reports on KdF's rural work from the *Gaus* East-

countryside was driven by the same goals and mingled theoretical and practical considerations as its work in urban Germany.

With the beginning of the war, the framework for *Dorfgemeinschaftsabende* shifted slightly. The evenings were now to constitute “hours of communal connection between front and homeland,” a venue for informing those villages who remained at home about front line experiences of others Germans, particularly those of their neighbors and family members. Village Community evenings also became sites for the commemoration of war victims native to the village.<sup>394</sup> Underlying these developments was KdF’s concern with keeping up the morale of the rural population during the war. The regime needed the support and productivity of the agricultural sector, especially economically. KdF wanted to sustain the farmers’ notion of being involved in the war, even as they remained geographically removed from the fighting. The goal was the formation of a spiritual community between the farmers and the rest of Germany, including the soldiers at the front. It is here where Village Evenings with their fostering a feeling of community retained their high importance. Obviously, any comical relief resulting from entertaining Village Evenings was also embraced by KdF organizers, since it was in line with these general concerns.

From an analysis of KdF’s Village Community Evenings, we can learn several things about KdF overall and its work in villages in particular. First, KdF’s strong

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Hanover and Westphalia-North. (Ibid., 55.)

<sup>394</sup> Hans Lorenzen, *Dorfbuch und Dorfabend im Kriege* (Berlin: Verl. der Dt. Arbeitsfront, 1940), 5. Such information was to be delivered by soldiers vacationing at home (in the villages), by reading aloud reports of the *Wehrmacht* and letters from the front and by tracing together with the villagers developments in the war on maps. Additionally, village evenings could contain the screening of a movie about issues relating to the army.

commitment to building community is again evident. Other principles of the organization, such as the aspired-to “active” component of “joy production” through leisure events, appear also have to been targeted by these events. While these evenings – in their conception – thus confirm several aspects of KdF’s work and goals previously explored in this study, we can also see a shift in the weighting of KdF’s ‘values’ and practices. In other words, there is something different about *Dorfgemeinschaftsabende*; an analysis of KdF’s writings on village evening reveals a significant concern with the dissemination of ideology in the work of the leisure organization in the countryside that cannot be discerned for KdF’s work in urban contexts. A KdF *Dorfgemeinschaftsabend* was, at least in conception, intended to ingrain and fortify Nazism’s “blood-and-soil” ideas, in fact much more so than parallel events elsewhere.

KdF’s work in the countryside was also driven by a fear it now had to deal with in its other works; one cannot fully understand the organization’s ideas and activities for villages without considering a main driving motive behind all this: the fight against the “*Landflucht*” [“flight from the land”] of the rural population.

When setting up KdF’s work in the German villages, Ley warned that it would be necessary to choose very carefully the KdF employees who were to work there. KdF expected the candidates to possess knowledge in the field of rural folklore and the ability “to speak a language understood by the peasants of their area.” In his directive to his organization about its village work, Ley also addressed that it was most important that the activities should not be “too urban.”<sup>395</sup> That its leisure activities could be too urban and

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<sup>395</sup> For a discussion of Nazi Germany’s general (critical) stance on urbanity and the agrarian-romantic component inherent in its ideology, see Klaus Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1970).

thus lead to an urbanization of the countryside – or provoke desire in the population for urban lifestyles – was the greatest fear for KdF in the arena of organizing rural leisure. Accordingly, KdF wanted to avoid at all costs bringing just those leisure events to the villages which were also offered in the cities. Instead, rural leisure activities should “correspond to the character of the peasant.” They should first and foremost “connect him to his soil” and be carried out mostly by the peasant himself. Only in this manner, so KdF’s and Ley’s logic, would leisure activities not risk being an incentive for the rural population to leave and migrate to the cities.<sup>396</sup> In his directive Ley urged KdF organizers in the countryside to make sure not to accidentally promote what they were there to fight against: the *Landflucht* of the German peasant, his flight from the land.

A massive migration of Germans away from the land had been underway since the late nineteenth century. From 1882 to 1907 alone, Germany’s agrarian population had decreased from 41.6 % to 28.4 % of the total population.<sup>397</sup> This decline continued during the following decades, and it did not cease during the Third Reich.<sup>398</sup> The Nazi government was very alarmed by this development. Hermann Göring, Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan for German Rearmament, threatened in 1937: “In future I will treat the flight from the land as an abdication of the responsibility that everyone has towards the whole economy,” and Martin Bormann, head of the Nazi Party Chancellery, called the flight from the land a “severe disturbance to a healthy population structure and thus a

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<sup>396</sup> BArch NS 22/ 782; directive by Robert Ley from Mar. 18, 1937.

<sup>397</sup> See Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918* (C.H.Beck, 1990), 199.

<sup>398</sup> See Corni and Gies, *Blut und Boden*, 50f.

danger for the life and the natural growth of the people” in a 1941 directive.<sup>399</sup>

The Nazi government’s direct measures against the flight from land had involved a 1934 prohibition on industrial firms hiring workers who had been formerly employed in the agricultural sector, as well as the introduction of the so-called “*Land Dienst*”, a voluntary service to work in the countryside.<sup>400</sup> A different approach consisted of attempting to improve the living and working conditions of the rural population, through, for example, “the construction of public housing, the lifting of the living standard of the peasants, the creation of sports grounds, swimming pools, beautiful community buildings and decent schools.”<sup>401,402</sup> KdF’s work in the countryside has to be considered a part of this undertaking.

KdF functionaries were convinced that the rural population’s wretched living situation was a significant reason for the Germans’ flight from the land. They did not only mean the economic situation – or at least, they did not emphasize that, probably due to a conjoint lack of motivation or means to remedy it – but rather pointed to the “cultural” situation of rural Germans.<sup>403</sup> In a text jointly written by Ley and Darré

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<sup>399</sup> Göring quoted after Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 234.; see also StA WF 127 Neu, Nr. 4722. For the Bormann quotation, see BArch NS 6/821, pag. 118; *Reichsverfügungsblatt der NSDAP*, September 9, 1941, *Anordnung A 40/41*.

<sup>400</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>401</sup> NHStA, Nds. 120 Hannover Acc. 58/65 Nr. 126; article from Mar. 25, 1941, *Hannoverscher Anzeiger*.

<sup>402</sup> Cf. Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 226f.

<sup>403</sup> The aforementioned directive by Martin Bormann, too, considered “cultural work” (*Kulturarbeit*) as the necessary step against the flight from the land. In his directive, Bormann calls for an enforced effort of all representatives in the villages and districts in the realm of culture. Identifying the “cultural life in the village as one of the most important political management tools”, he orders: “It must be the goal, next to cultural events which are brought from outside, to awaken the numerous self-forces of the village [...] and to use them in an appropriate organizational form under the direct influence of the party as a means of political leadership for our events and celebrations. This will not only deepen the rootedness of the farmers and farm laborers within their village community, but will also counteract in an ideological respect party-

regarding KdF's leisure time work in the countryside from 1937, the authors argued that German peasants had been deprived in the past, in a period vaguely described as that of the "class struggle," from any of the cultural wealth Germany had produced. This diagnosis was very similar to that frequently presented by KdF propaganda with regard to the situation of German workers. According to Darré's and Ley's text, "the village's culture was taken away from it and thus the village was made soulless." It was because of this "disgrace and degradation" of the peasants that they left their villages behind and migrated to the cities, attempting to participate in urban cultural offerings.<sup>404</sup> Thus for Ley and Darré, the flight from the land was above all a cultural problem. Accordingly, they believed that interventions into the cultural sphere of the villages would bring it to a halt. The leisure organization was chosen as the tool to achieve this by intervening directly in the cultural situation of Germany's rural population.<sup>405</sup> Ley and Darré clarified that such attempts to "culturally conserve and revive the village" would also be fruitful and profitable for Germany as a whole. After all, they considered "the village as the people's eternal fountain of youth,"<sup>406</sup> so any improvement to the village and the joy and

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hostile influences, which particularly in the countryside impede the political implementation of National Socialism." (BArch NS 6/821, pag. 118; *Reichsverfügungsblatt der NSDAP* from Sep. 9, 1941, Anordnung A 40/41.)

<sup>404</sup> A similar argumentation can be found in an article from May 25, 1938 in the newspaper *Hannoversches Tageblatt*, summarizing a meeting of the working group "The Beautiful Village" Gau South-Hanover-Brunswick (NHStA, Nds. 120 Hannover Acc. 58/65 Nr. 126).

<sup>405</sup> Even at the time, however, these kinds of activities and plans were criticized by some observers as pointless and dismissed as merely aiming at a "propagandistic emphasis and ideological valorization of farm labor".<sup>405</sup> The Bureau for Agriculture in Pfarrkirchen, Bavaria, for example, criticized interventions to improve the life conditions in German villages as "mere theory," drawn up by those who have "no idea about the true causes" of Germans leaving the countryside. (*Landwirtschaftsstelle* Pfarrkirchen, quoted after Theresia Bauer, *Nationalsozialistische Agrarpolitik und bäuerliches Verhalten im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Eine Regionalstudie zur ländlichen Gesellschaft in Bayern* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 1996), 134.)

<sup>406</sup> BArch R 4902 / 6329, pag. 19; "K.d.F. übernimmt Feierabendgestaltung auf dem Lande,"

strength of the villagers would eventually spread out to benefit the entire Reich.

Accordingly, in 1937 KdF started its official “cultural care of the countryside” in order to “more strongly ingrain the rural inhabitant into the soil of his homeland, his sod and his village community.”<sup>407</sup> This meant that KdF now introduced its large repertoire of leisure offerings to the German countryside, including “readings by poets, narrations of fairy tales and stories, film and puppetry, travelling circuses, [...] vaudeville, and singing and music communities.”<sup>408</sup> With all this, KdF aimed to augment villagers’ satisfaction with their life in the countryside. But, as already mentioned above, the leisure organization was aware that its endeavors could potentially have the opposite effect, by giving a glimpse into more exciting cultural lives in the urban centers of the Third Reich. KdF was at great pains to avoid any such outcome; in one of its programmatic writings, “On the Task and Nature of Village Community Work,” it stated the following “basic principle”:

The entire cultural entertainment [kulturelle Betreuung, literally “cultural caretaking”] of the village through events should be an affair “of the village” itself, in fact it is totally independent of the city. It is not the matter of being an “offshoot” from the city, it is not some kind of “pittance,” but it is a matter of cultural institutions of the so-called “flat land,” which are created by this land itself and which they practically sustain for themselves and autonomously. The village mustn’t connect the performances even with the thought of the city, then every wrong and undesired appeal is avoided. [StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; manuscript “Von der Aufgabe und vom Wesen der Dorfgemeinschaftsarbeit,” 21.]

When KdF says here that the village events should be an “affair of the village,” this

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*Nationalsozialistische Landzeitung*, Mar.19, 1937.

<sup>407</sup> BArch NS 25/1249, pag. 65; “Aufklärungs- und Redner Informationsmaterial der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP und des Reichspropagandaamtes der Deutschen Arbeitsfront.”

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

refers to both the events' content and their execution. If possible, the entertainment, be it music or theater, was to staged by local amateur performers. KdF also tried to come up with alternative, non-urban contents for its events the countryside. This meant activities consonant with its *völkisch* "blood-and soil" ideology, activities which were mainly embedded in what was considered "tradition" and "folk art." The above-cited text included lists of both suitable and unsuitable types of events for Germany's rural population. For instance, vaudeville events "showing things with much tinsel and flare [*Flimmer und Flitter*]" would be "no good for the countryside," whereas "sporting and acrobatic performances without such fuss would impress the peasant much more." Neither emcees with "platitudinous innuendos" and "sleazy jokes" should be employed in the villages, nor those kinds of orchestras and bands with "foreign – partly Jewish-sweetish or Negro-rhythmical sounds [*jüdisch-süßlichen oder Neger-rhythmischen Klängen.*]" In fact, generally musical stage performances were not suitable in order "to avoid the trivialization [*Verkitschung*] of true values." The text argued similarly regarding theatrical performances for the countryside: "Also senseless are those sad trashy ensembles [*Schmierer*], which have been worn out in the cities and which now believe that they can save themselves with the last residue of their 'abilities' by retreating to the countryside and the 'stupid' peasants. Instead of all these things, KdF's cultural work in the countryside should incorporate "good travelling theaters," "puppetry" and "amateur theatre groups if they cultivate fresh, authentic lay theatre close to the people." Generally, the leisure organization should attempt to mobilize many of the local singing and musical clubs.<sup>409</sup> KdF's ideas about the actual implementation of its leisure events in

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<sup>409</sup> StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; section "Sonstige Veranstaltungen auf dem Lande" from manuscript "Von der Aufgabe und vom Wesen der Dorfgemeinschaftsarbeit," 16-19.



the countryside and what these should be clearly shows how they were to be “affairs of the village.” This went beyond KdF’s usual goal of promoting collective activity; there was a clear ambition here to indeed ‘separate’ the leisure of the countryside from urban offerings.

In light of KdF’s underlying goal of promoting the Nazi-envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*, such an agenda appears on first sight counterintuitive: should not the very idea of a harmonious community mean that all of its members ought to be treated to the same kind of leisure events? KdF’s plans for the countryside certainly did not give up on building the *Volksgemeinschaft*; quite the contrary, for all its activities aimed at building a Village Community, which was believed to be an important element of the national unity. However, we clearly see here that the *Dorfgemeinschaft* and the Factory Community (the sub-element of the *Volksgemeinschaft* described in the first chapter) were not to be treated equally. One explanation for the discrepancy is the way worries about the flight from the land affected KdF’s outlook. By the same token, however, KdF’s work in the factories, too, was not untouched by parallel fears. But there, it was the fear of revolting workers that led KdF to downplay or omit political content from its programs. That such fears significantly changed KdF’s outlook, and in what manner, can only be seen after an analysis of both these areas of the leisure organization’s work – in other words, only by considering KdF’s activities in the cities and the villages side by side can we gain a fully understanding of what KdF wanted to do.

KdF’s Institute for the Education of the People was, in addition the Leisure Department, also engaged in the project of “bringing culture to the German countryside.” In addition to its involvement up to 1937 in the organizing of Village Community

Evenings; the *Volksbildungswerk* arranged lectures, organized excursions to museums or art exhibitions, initiated workshops and offered classes in many different areas.<sup>410</sup> With both the Institute for Education and the Leisure Department, KdF aimed to expose the German population to its country's high culture, such as German classical music, plays etc. In order to make this possible despite potential shortfalls in the necessary infrastructure, KdF was especially active in founding and running travelling theaters.<sup>411</sup> Here, then, KdF's work in rural Germany did not differ drastically from what it did in cities; similarly to its undertakings for German workers, the leisure organization was eager to allow German farmers and rural workers access to cultural productions which had previously been largely limited to upper-class audiences.

KdF's sports in the countryside reveals what KdF wanted to do the villagers' bodies. Sports were an important tool in KdF's struggle against the Germans peasants' flight from the land, especially because of the "community building force" which was attributed to KdF-organized sports activities.<sup>412</sup> In order to do so, KdF initiated the foundation of "*Dorfsportgemeinschaften*" ["Village Sport Communities,"] administered

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<sup>410</sup> There seems to have been an ongoing attempt to intensify the educational work in the German villages – a February 1937 letter by the local DAF leader in Brunswick to the Minister of Education in the state of Brunswick, for example, requests the mobilization of more teachers to work – *pro bono* – for KdF's Institute of the Education of the People in order to facilitate the educational work in all remote rural areas. (See StA WF, 12 Neu 13, Nr. 22240; letter to Brunswick's Minister of Instruction and the Education of the People, Feb. 17, 1937.) In addition to an interest in the reaching of the rural population, these letters also reveal that KdF's activities, as so often, should preferably not cost too much: they should be either based on the volunteers' work or be funded by sources other than KdF or DAF. Many of the letters to local district administrations about KdF and its *Volksbildungswerk* are requests to financially support the latter's activities.

<sup>411</sup> See StA WF, 129 Neu Fb. 2, Nr. 5934; letter from Deutsche Gemeindetag, Brunswick state department, June 6, 1937.)

<sup>412</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 33.

by the organization's Sports Department.<sup>413</sup> In line with the same general attitude we have already seen, KdF was eager to avoid "urbanization" in the area of sport. This meant that instead of the kinds of sports which were offered by KdF in the cities, the leisure organization wanted to put its focus on "völkisch gymnastic exercises" when it came to sports in the countryside.<sup>414</sup> For KdF, these *völkische Leibesübungen* mainly consisted of games that had a certain tradition in the villages, such as ball games, traditional forms of bowling, horse riding or wrestling.<sup>415</sup> In these sports and games, KdF then also set up competitions between neighboring villages, hoping that this would function as another means to promote a feeling of community achieved by collectively experienced joy.<sup>416</sup> Additionally, such events were considered especially apt "to re-awaken old traditions and to let new ones develop."<sup>417</sup> Generally, sport was believed to be a productive expression of happiness, strength and *joie de vivre*. KdF hoped that sports would help to improve the rural population's attitude towards their life and place of residence, and would in turn reduce the population's desires to abandon the countryside.<sup>418</sup> In order to achieve such

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<sup>413</sup> According to a 1937 *Arbeitertum* article, KdF sports had been practiced in the village since 1934 with rising success and attendance numbers, despite problems in this field with finding appropriate exercise spaces, and a lack, in particular, of swimming pools. (See Schnauck, "Der Sport muß auf's Land: Der Einsatz des Sportamtes der NSG "Kraft durch Freude," *Arbeitertum*, Apr. 1, 1937, 24.) However, it appears that only after 1937 and the agreement between Darré and Ley about KdF's work in the countryside, was sport specifically for the countryside offered.

<sup>414</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 33.

<sup>415</sup> For a more detailed description of these games and others as well as their place in the annual cycle of the village, according to KdF, see Hirschfeld's account on "*Bauernspiele, brauchtumsgebundene Leibesübungen*" ("Peasant games, gymnastic exercises with folk background.") (Ibid., 153–159.)

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>417</sup> StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; section "Leibesübungen auf dem Lande" from manuscript "Von der Aufgabe und vom Wesen der Dorfgemeinschaftsarbeit," 21–22.

<sup>418</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 159.

results, KdF announced the employment of an *Ortssportwart* [Local Sport Attendant] in each village. Furthermore, KdF promised to lobby for the erection of more sports facilities in the countryside.<sup>419</sup> With all this, KdF hoped to foster feelings of community and binding people to their home regions.

Such community building through sports was of course not unique to the villages, nor was the fact that KdF also promoted sports here because of its beneficiary character in regards to the rural population's health. This second aim, however, is in the countryside much more directly linked to Nazi racial thinking and eugenics, at least on the level of KdF's programmatic writing. KdF publications about the organization's work in the village reveal that sports should support the (ideologically driven) population policy of the regime. A prime task for sports was its functioning as a "fruitful" arena for matchmaking and consequent procreation. Doing sports would allow "individual girls and boys get to know each other, learn about their value in games, competitions and special achievements." Sports in the village thus had clear long-term goal, as a KdF brochure points out: "The exercises thus fulfill certain breeding prerequisites."<sup>420</sup> Such intentions mean KdF sports in the countryside aimed to secure the future of a traditional, village-based peasantry, and thus significantly support what was considered by many Nazi thinkers an important base of the nation's stability and future.

KdF public statements on sports, such as the one above, are evidence for how much leisure and sports in rural Germany were ideologically charged. In other words, the organization followed Darré's *völkisch* "blood and soil" ideas when it came to its policies

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<sup>419</sup> StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; section "Leibesübungen auf dem Lande" from manuscript "Von der Aufgabe und vom Wesen der Dorfgemeinschaftsarbeit", 21-22.

<sup>420</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 159.

and goals in German villages. Darré firmly believed that sports in the countryside was necessary in order to facilitate the “breeding” of German peasants, whom he considered “a new nobility” and the racial backbone of Germany. He explained in a 1935 article entitled “We and Gymnastic Exercises,” published in *Odal*, his *Magazine for Blood and Soil*, that “the farm youth has to exercise, so that they can do justice to their task of bringing sufficient health into marriage. [...] the German farm youth must exercise [...] for the sake of their physical health but also for the idea of breed selection.” For Darré, physical exercise was not just playing around. Instead, its purpose was to further the “state conception of blood and soil [*Staatsgedanke von Blut und Boden*]”.<sup>421</sup> This ideological interpretation of sports and physical exercises as tools to ensure the production of racially superior German farmers was adapted by KdF organizers in their work in the countryside, at least discursively, in their publications. Such open ‘ideologization’ is quite different to what KdF said (or did) when it came to sports in the German factories. With Darre as one of its driving forces, we once again see how KdF’s village events differed from urban activities in a more openly ideological orientation.

As mentioned above, KdF’s cultural activities in villages as well as its sports offerings were efforts aimed mainly “internally” at the rural population, i.e. at their bodies and personalities. KdF’s work was also interested in the “place” the German population lived in, while at the same time still being concerned with the “persons” in the village, more precisely, with linking them more closely to their villages. For KdF, this was to be achieved through the introduction of *Dorfbücher* [Village Books.] Behind this was the belief of many working for KdF – following Darré and his fellow “blood and

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<sup>421</sup> SA GS, Nachlass Darré Nr. 200; Walter Darré, “Wir und die Leibesübungen,” *Odal: Monatszeitschrift für Blut und Boden*, Heft 10, 3. Jahrgang, April 1935, 710ff.

soil” ideologues – that the German village was the site of an ancient, *völkisch* German form of life and that that villagers were losing touch with their past and history. This – supposed – development alarmed KdF’s organizers; they considered the German village in imminent danger of vanishing. This is where the *Dorfbuch* was to come in and counteract such a process as the practice of chronicling each village’s history and present would reconnect the villagers to their village and its past.<sup>422</sup> As so often, the leisure organization’s propaganda did not shy away from bombastic projections for this innovation. The *Dorfbuch*, KdF claimed, would become “the permanent source of life for the village community.”<sup>423</sup> The Village Book would cover all aspects of village life, such as “economy, folklore, population development, villagescape, village meadows etc.”<sup>424</sup> KdF also encouraged including images and drawings as well as the collection of contemporary material such as newspaper articles, public announcements or coupons to illustrate the “execution of the economic struggle.”<sup>425</sup> It published clear guidelines and suggestions on how to devise a *Dorfbuch*. For example, the respective village’s situation during several historical periods was to be addressed, such as the epoch of Charlemagne’s rule, of the First and Second Empires and so on, as well as its economic situation and geography, including its location in regards to rivers, medieval trade routes or the newly-

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<sup>422</sup> There was conflict between KdF and local administrative authorities in this area, since the latter themselves had been keeping chronicles of the history and present of rural communities, so-called “*Gemeindechroniken*” (“District Chronicles”), since 1936. (See BArch NS 25/ 1291.)

<sup>423</sup> BArch R 36/ 2379; *Das Dorfbuch als Mittelpunkt des dörflichen Lebens* [brochure.]

<sup>424</sup> BArch NS 25/ 1291; Hans Lorenzen, *Das Dorfbuch als Grundlage dörflicher Erziehung und Volksbildung*

<sup>425</sup> BArch NS 25/1291, pag. 16; Anton Link, *Das Dorfbuch als Führungsmittel im Kriege*. Similarly, another KdF publication suggested that each family start a private “*Kriegsarchiv im Bücherschrank*” (“War archive on the bookshelf”) at home; see Deutsches Volksbildungswerk Gau Mainfranken, ed., *Rüstzeug zur Kulturarbeit auf dem Lande* (Würzburg, 1939), 37.

built *Autobahn* system. The guideline's section on "folklore" reveals quite clearly the influence of Nazi ideology. Here, the inherent idea is that the German people lived in a state of permanent threat from foreign entities: the village inhabitants are asked, for example, to describe their village's history in the times of the Magyar attacks,<sup>426</sup> in the period of occupation by foreign armies during the Thirty Years' War and the Napoleonic era. Also, the guidelines include the suggestion to write on the topic "Jews are settling! Disappearing again after 1933."<sup>427</sup> It is again clearly visible here that KdF's ideas for activities in the countryside were not characterized by any reticence about alluding to or articulating Nazi ideology. KdF wanted the Village Books to be written in "simple language, understandable by everybody," in order to make sure of reaching all villagers. Using the "style of language" spoken in the respective village was considered crucial for the authors of a village book: "The peasant must feel that what is written there is written especially for him in the language of his surroundings [...]"<sup>428</sup> The somewhat patronizing tone on the part of the KdF in its insistence that the *Dorfbuch* must be written simply enough to be understood by the villagers cannot be overlooked. It speaks to KdF's assumption about the necessity of "civilizing" the rural population, and that it itself would join this civilizing process through its leisure activities.

This "civilizing" also included political education and helping villagers to overcome a lack of self-esteem. The responsibility for initiating and monitoring this through the *Dorfbuch* fell to the Institute for the Education of People. This administrative

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<sup>426</sup> This probably refers to Magyar incursions into Franconia in the 10th century, although it is not further explained in the source (a KdF brochure of the *Gau* Main-Franconia, located in Lower Franconia.)

<sup>427</sup> Deutsches Volksbildungswerk Gau Mainfranken, *Rüstzeug zur Kulturarbeit auf dem Lande*, 37.

<sup>428</sup> BArch R 36/ 2379; *Das Dorfbuch als Mittelpunkt des dörflichen Lebens* [brochure.]

choice reveals the leisure organization's primary educational purpose with this book. As a KdF organizer put it: "The work on the Village Book is local history and furthermore education of human beings for National Socialism. [...] With the Village Book, contemporary politics becomes comprehensible and ideological teaching is made easy."<sup>429</sup> Besides political education, the Village Book was to become a tool for the villagers to overcome their low self-esteem and lack of pride. If villagers learned about their ancestry and the past of their immediate homeland through the *Dorfbuch*, this would "contribute to the raising of rural self-confidence," or so a KdF publication claimed. The goal was to recover something that had been lost: "The human being in the village has no more trust in his own performance and in his tradition, [...] and this trust must be given back to him."<sup>430</sup>

So, ultimately, KdF wanted to use the Village book in its struggle against the German peasants' "flight from the land," particularly by raising the villager's self-esteem and pride in his locale. Once collected and put together, so went the KdF's scheme, the *Dorfbuch*'s presentation could become part of a Village Evening, or the basis for an exhibition in the village about itself. Most importantly, presentations of the Village Book should always link the individual village's situation to that of the German Reich overall and vice versa. In this manner, KdF conceptualized the *Dorfbuch* as yet another tool to form the German *Volksgemeinschaft* and to make Germany's villagers feel a part of it.

This (discursive) inclusion of the German rural population into the Third Reich overall and the Nazi-envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft* gained even more importance after

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<sup>429</sup> BAArch NS 25/1291, pag. 15; Anton Link, *Das Dorfbuch als Führungsmittel im Kriege*.

<sup>430</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 31.



the start of World War II. The support of the countryside for the war and its involvement in it was crucial for the Third Reich – given the regime’s dependence on Germany’s agricultural production. How much KdF’s work in the villages during the war was defined through this need to display and secure the rural population’s involvement is described in the following paragraph from a book by KdF about its wartime work in the German countryside:

Through our instructional work we must show the peasantry that the struggle of the German people is also the struggle of the village [...]. We must [...] demonstrate how the village participated in past struggles and how it decided these struggles for itself and for the greater context, and then we will see how each village will today, too, only win and secure its individual future through a victory in the greater [German] struggle, since the fate of our homeland and our village is linked to the fate of the *Reich* and the people. [Hans Lorenzen, *Dorfbuch und Dorfabend im Kriege* (Berlin: Verl. der Dt. Arbeitsfront, 1940), 4.]

To achieve this linkage of villagers and the overall *Volk* after 1939, KdF organizers emphasized the increased importance of keeping a Village Book in times of war. The *Dorfbuch* was transformed into a means of communication between front and home and as such was to include reports and letters from soldiers at the front who were native to the village. In the Village Book, the “war with all its events and contexts was to be anchored with the family, with the village.”<sup>431</sup> Moreover, the Village Book would make sure that later generations could learn as much as possible about the war and their village’s participation in it. Anton Link, a local group leader of the Nazi party and a KdF activist in rural Hesse, emphatically exclaimed that “later generations have the right to learn how we coped with the economic matters and demands which were forced upon us; how neighborly help began and how the homeland came to constitute a solid, steel-hard

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<sup>431</sup> BArch NS 25/1291, pag. 15; Anton Link, *Das Dorfbuch als Führungsmittel im Kriege* .

structure.”<sup>432</sup> It is interesting to see that this type of agenda meant the Village Books were directed not only at villagers’ present and their past, but also attempted a connection to the future and future generations of the village. Community building through the Village book thus had a generation-transcending aspect to it; linking villagers, the village, and villagers of different time periods.

The Village Books were meant to link villagers to their home villages. This in itself was an “external” aim, but it was mainly to be achieved through changing their mentalities, i.e. in an “internal” way. More “external” was KdF’s work in the realm of the so-called “*Dorfverschönerungsaktion*” [“Campaign for the Beautification of the Village,”] which was considered alongside cultural offerings as another crucial measure in KdF’s struggle against the *Landflucht* of the German peasantry. With this program, KdF was eager to actively change the “soil” of German villages. The leisure organization’s engagement in this field began in 1936.<sup>433</sup> The beautification campaigns were KdF attempts to improve the aesthetic appearance of German villages. However, despite its publications frequently using the word “to beautify” (“*verschönern*”) in texts

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid, pag. 16. The communication between village and front was complemented by the so-called *Heimatbrief* (Letter from the Homeland), which was a letter from the local Nazi party authorities to a village’s soldiers on the front, reporting on the situation of the respective village or village district. (See BArch NS 25/1291, pag 16;

Anton Link, *Das Dorfbuch als Führungsmittel im Kriege* and Lorenzen, *Dorfbuch und Dorfabend im Kriege*, 8. The KdF publications emphasize that the advantage of these writings was their objective style in describing events at home, not causing disturbances to the soldiers' morale, as it could potentially happen through private letters which might “sometimes in individual cases [...] [contain] descriptions of inadequacies.” (Ibid., 7.) Clearly, such a statement reveals the Nazi party's attempt to control the information given to the soldiers about the situation in the villages.

<sup>433</sup> BArch NS 22/ 553; Franz Gutmiedl, *Die Dorfverschönerungsaktion der NSG*. “*Kraft durch Freude*” [Brochure of DAF propaganda department]. Thus, we have another case of KdF activity in the countryside before KdF’s official entry there with the Ley- Darré-agreement from spring 1937, this time apparently through initiatives of the KdF sub-department “Beauty of Labor,” which was in charge of the beautification campaigns. (See also footnotes 8 and 11.)

about efforts to reform the villages, the organization clarified that they in fact did more than just that:

[In the past], one beautified the villages, but just externally. We do not beautify the villages, we take care of them, we create “The Beautiful Village.” [...] Not for strangers [who come as tourists], but for the inhabitants of the village. [BArch NS 22/551; “Die Dörfer werden schöner,” *KdF Monatsheft der Gau Süd-Hannover- Braunschweig*, January/ February 1939.]

It was KdF’s hope and goal that this work would in turn improve the peasants’ lives and deflect any urges to leave the villages. According to a schedule set up in the district of Brunswick in 1938 for the KdF workgroup “The Beautiful Village,” the beautification should follow a three year plan: the first year would lead to “The Clean Village,” a village “freed” from all trash and advertisement, with the building of a swimming pool and other community facilities, such as kindergartens, community houses and KdF halls, commenced. In the second year, the workgroup would assist in creating “The Cultivated Village,” with newly designed village squares, renovated and repainted houses and so on. At the end of this second year, a competition in the district to decide on the “Most Cultivated Village” would take place. The beautification campaign of the villages was then to be completed in the third year, when the villages’ outer appearance was to be perfected and when the erection of all communal buildings should be finished, to arrive at the final goal: “The Beautiful Village.” This third year, too, was to be concluded by a competition choosing “The Most Beautiful Village” of the district.<sup>434</sup>

Insight into the implementation of these beautification programs program can be gained by scrutinizing the extensive guidelines published a year before, in 1937, by the

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<sup>434</sup> See StA WF, 128 Neu 162; letter from the KdF- Department “Beauty of Labor,” *Gau* working group “The Beautiful Village” to the German Community Council [*Deutscher Gemeindetag*], Brunswick, January 11, 1938.

KdF section in the *Gau* South-Hanover-Brunswick for the villages in its region. Over 14 pages long, this text lists in detail the tasks to be fulfilled to reach the program's aim, a "beautiful village according to National Socialist belief."<sup>435</sup> A later article in the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* functions well as a briefer summary of the measures:

the cleaning of the village streets and villages squares, desilting of village ponds, the exposing of timber framing which was poorly or unnecessarily covered, the building of roads, the disembarassment the overall village appearance of ugly advertisements, the accurate and shapely designing of hedges, fences and walls, the creation of sports fields, swimming pools, leisure time homes, village community centers, kindergartens, Hitler-Youth-homes, the improvement of sewage systems, the setting up of proper sanitary and hygienic facilities, the improvement of artificial lightning and more things. [BArch NS 22/553; *Völkischer Beobachter*, Dec. 1, 1940.]

These beautification campaigns went often hand in hand with choosing a certain village to become a KdF *Musterdorf* (model village). In a concerted effort, KdF, together with several other Nazi organizations, would set out to transform this *Musterdorf*. An



**Life in a KdF *Musterdorf*:** Fig.4.2. "Model Villages Inaugurated: "Strength through Joy's" Village Beautification Campaign in Full Operation," *Arbeiterzeitung*, September 15, 1936, 25. The caption reads: "Spin, spin! Mother and daughter sit in the evenings in front of the pretty timbered houses."

*Arbeiterzeitung* article from September 1936 praised work done by KdF in Wendhausen, a village near Brunswick, which had been chosen to become a model village. For several months, KdF was busy painting garden fences, cleaning up farmyards, pulling down decrepit

<sup>435</sup> StA WF, 128 Neu 162; "Richtlinien zur Dorfverschönerungsaktion 1937."

barns and building new ones, broadening and straightening streets and so on. The pubs were supplied with new wrought-iron signs, while “ugly” advertisements were removed. Apparently, KdF’s commitment to “modern thinking” in the village went only so far; despite programmatic statements such as the one describing how it was KdF’s intent to “return [the model village] its original state [*Ursprünglichkeit*] but also to impress [*Stempel aufzudrücken*] on it in its exterior appearance the mark of modern thinking.”<sup>436</sup> At least the Wendhausen case suggests a discrepancy between any ‘modernizing’ aspect of KdF’s stated goals and those revealed in its practical work. The photograph accompanying the article about this work in Wendhausen (above) shows a group of women in traditional costumes with spinning wheels in front of a traditional northern German house. The photo’s caption reads: “Spin, spin! Mother and daughter sit in the evenings in front of the pretty timbered houses.”<sup>437</sup> A return to such traditional life styles, including the corresponding gender roles, was clearly part of KdF’s vision for the countryside and something they attempted to foster through their work and beautification campaigns there. The curious wording of the previously-quoted KdF statement should also be noted: KdF “impresses” its ideas on the village. This suggests that such activity did not necessarily originate with the villagers. Instead, we can see an attempt at a top-down intervention on the part of KdF. Not unsurprisingly, such disenfranchisement did not meet with much support from the targeted populations; they often did not embrace the

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<sup>436</sup> “Gau Südhannover-Braunschweig: Musterdörfer wurden eingeweiht. Die Dorfverschönerungsaktion der NSG ‘Kraft durch Freude’ in vollem Gange,” *Arbeitertum*, Sep. 15, 1936, 25. According to the article, as well as KdF the German Labor Front, the *Reichsnährstand* (Reich Food Office,) the *Reich Arbeitsdienst* [Reich Labor Service] and the *Technische Nothilfe* [Technical Help in Need] were involved in this campaign.

<sup>437</sup> “Gau Südhannover-Braunschweig: Musterdörfer wurden eingeweiht. Die Dorfverschönerungsaktion der NSG ‘Kraft durch Freude’ in vollem Gange,” *Arbeitertum*, Sep.15, 1936, 25.

beautification programs.<sup>438</sup>

The disenchantment of villagers with KdF's beautification programs was also grounded in the fact that they themselves were expected to carry out a lot of the work initiated by KdF. While the German Labor Front and Strength through Joy helped to finance the beautification activities in German model villages and others,<sup>439</sup> a large part of the cost had to be paid out of the funds of the villages, communes or districts themselves. Alternatively – and KdF publications and letters pressed this option again and again – the work should be carried out by the villagers themselves, for free. For example, a KdF directive from 1935, addressed to the mayors of German rural communities, clarified:

It needs to be conveyed to the people in the countryside, that the beautification of the village must be conducted by themselves, and that we cannot provide them with cash in hand and that we are furthermore not allowed to do so. [StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; KdF directive from Mar. 17, 1935.]

Similar demands were made in a 1936 letter by a district administrator named Kühn from Silesia; over two pages, he detailed what should be done to beautify the village, all on a voluntary basis by the village's inhabitants. Directing his letter to the mayors of the villages in question, he appealed to the villagers' sense of community and their patriotic feelings for their home village. His letter had a demanding tone, but did not include any threats of punishment. However, he also sent his directive to the district's police authorities, asking them to enforce execution of the beautification efforts by the villagers if not done voluntarily.<sup>440</sup> Apparently, his belief in the prevailing sense of community,

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<sup>438</sup> Such reluctance is not surprising, given KdF expected the village inhabitants to carry out many of the works the leisure organization deemed necessary – often without being paid for this.

<sup>439</sup> For example, an announcement by KdF in the *Gau* South-Hanover-Brunswick claimed to have spent more than 8 million *Reichsmark* until 1939 for this work (See BArch NS 22/ 551; *KdF Monatsheft der Gau Süd-Hannover-Braunschweig*, February 1939.)

<sup>440</sup> Letter from *Landrat* Kühn from April 15, 1936, reproduced in Herbert Steinwarz, ed., *Wesen, Aufgaben*,

which he described so emphatically in his letter to the villages' mayors, was not that strong after all. Kühn either anticipated resistance from the villagers or had experienced such previously. Given the generally intrusive character of KdF's work, the condescension involved in its practice, and the work it demanded without financial remuneration, it is not surprising that KdF's beautification efforts were not always met with sheer enthusiasm. Other letters, similar to Kühn's, often by KdF representatives, also suggest that both local authorities, such as mayors and local administrators, and the villagers did not participate as desired in the beautification work of the village.<sup>441</sup>

While unwilling to give much financial support, the leisure organization was much more generous when it came to offering advice on how the villagers could manage the beautification work without using (much) money. KdF ideas, ranging from suggestions to villagers to fix their fences, plant roses or a tree in front of their houses, as well as placing a bench and a table there, sound trite and banal, but they also reveal a somewhat uncomfortable eagerness on the part of the leisure organization to intrude – and “improve” – each detail of the villagers' everyday life. Again, the tone of voice was notably condescending. For example, the KdF directive from 1935 criticized the lack of floral decorations in the windows of houses in Northern and Central Germany, and recommends that “the understanding and love for this must be instilled again.” Also, the farmers were to be informed “that they have the worst gardens existing in Germany.

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*Ziele des Amtes “Schönheit der Arbeit”. Veröffentlichungen des Amtes “Schönheit der Arbeit”, 1934-1937* (Berlin, 1937), 117–120.

<sup>441</sup> Cf. StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; letter from Apr. 19, 1937 to all mayors of the Wolfenbüttel district, which was sent out a year after the above-cited directive (which had been circulated to the mayors on April 23, 1936), criticizing that “these measures have been successful cannot be asserted or only very minimally so, for the Wolfenbüttel district.”

Every small allotment garden is more orderly than that of a farmer.”<sup>442</sup> We can see here how KdF considered rural inhabitant’s living styles to be deficient. Only activities initiated through the leisure organization would bring about the required “civilizing” to overcome these shortcomings. Thus, KdF’s beautification campaigns in the villages reveal quite clearly that the leisure organization intended to have a civilizing effect on the countryside’s population.

Part of this ‘civilizing mission’ was an obsession on KdF’s part to tidy and clean rural sites. KdF’s eagerness to clean places was connected to its assuming a linkage between moral and physical dirt. KdF’s work in the village with *Dorfverschönerungsaktionen* was quite similar to the organization’s policies towards cleaning industrial plants and workers. In the villages, too, KdF assumed that a degeneration of positive peasant values was both symbolized by and caused by a filthy, derelict environment. The aforementioned 1936 letter from a district administrator in Silesia stated in this context:

Generally, cleanliness must be the guiding star of each German peasant. To a visitor, the houses and farms of a village should appear clean and orderly. [...] By no means should slurry run onto the streets. [...] A cultivated and well-kept villagescape symbolizes the community living in it. [Letter by *Landrat Kühn* from Apr. 15, 1936, reproduced in Herbert Steinwarz, ed., *Wesen, Aufgaben, Ziele des Amtes “Schönheit der Arbeit”*. *Veröffentlichungen des Amtes “Schönheit der Arbeit”, 1934-1937* (Berlin, 1937), 117–120.]

With villagers being made to clean up their homes and surroundings, we witness Nazism’s totalitarian intrusion into the German peasant’s everyday life. With the beautification programs, KdF enforced a micro-managing of the rural populations’ immediate living environment. In its propaganda, the organization emphasized that this

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<sup>442</sup> StA WF, 127 Neu Nr. 4722; KdF directive from Mar. 17, 1935.



was for the sake of the people living in the villages. Its work would bring back to the surface the genuine character of German villages, which had been lost due to neglect and corruption by foreign (and urban) influences in the recent past.<sup>443</sup> However, even publications by KdF and guidelines on its work in rural Germany sometimes hinted that what had been lost was not always bemoaned by the village inhabitants. Thus, KdF's actual first goal appears to have been bringing back the desire to return to what the Nazis believed to be the perfect village.

Overall, KdF's interventions aimed at the cleaning and purification of the village and to make it fit the Nazi anti-modern concept of "blood and soil" – as illustrated in the case of the model village Wendhausen. However, while the organization made sure to ban anything urban from the villages, it was also careful not to cut the rural countryside off entirely from the twentieth century. The picture shown below, illustrating an example of a German village as imagined by KdF would seem to suggest that, given that a car is prominently shown on the village's street.<sup>444</sup> After all, one goal behind KdF activities – and especially behind its branch "Beauty of Labor," which was responsible for the beautification programs –, was to lighten Germans' burdens in life and work through the

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<sup>443</sup> See BArch NS 22/ 553; Franz Gutmiedl, *Die Dorfverschönerungsaktion der NSG. "Kraft durch Freude"* [brochure of DAF propaganda department.]

<sup>444</sup> The photograph is taken from a propaganda book for KdF – the image itself thus should be treated as propaganda. The automobile depicted appears to be a convertible *KdF-Wagen*, the predecessor of the *Volkswagen* Beetle. The car was produced in newly built factories in the so-called "Kraft durch Freude-Stadt" (renamed "Wolfsburg" after WWII), founded by KdF and DAF in 1938. The display of this car in this photograph is not only an advertisement by KdF for its own product, but more generally allows KdF to display the organization's (and the regime's) modernity, which it was bringing even to the most remote villages. (On the history of the *KdF-Wagen* or *Volkswagen*, see Hans Mommsen and Manfred Grieger, *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: ECON, 1997). On the eagerness of the Nazi regime and the KdF to offer "people's products," see Wolfgang König, *Volkswagen, Volksempfänger, Volksgemeinschaft: "Volkspunkte" im Dritten Reich. Vom Scheitern einer nationalsozialistischen Konsumgesellschaft* (Paderborn; Munich: Schöningh, 2004). The extent of the propaganda involved is revealed by the fact that in 1938 – the date of this publication – KdF's cars were not yet available to the general population.

implementation of modern technologies. Thus, we can discern an ongoing tension in KdF publications between the pronouncements for a return to a glorious traditional past and demands for a modernization of the village's infrastructure. In a nutshell, KdF's beautification campaigns were an embodiment of this ambivalence, trying to "modernize" the villages into a state that was to resemble a traditional one. It appears, however, that in general, KdF was never really successful in catering towards both



**Beautified German Village:**

Fig. 4.3 A clean, orderly and "friendly village street." (Karl Busch, *Unter dem Sonnenrad* [Berlin: Verlag der DAF, 1938], 80. The street is cleared of any advertising signs, and there are floral ornaments in the windows. Remarkable is the presence of a car, which could be read as an attempt by KdF to allude to its modernity in this propaganda picture, a modernity in the village amidst timber framed houses.

directions. In its cultural work, for example, despite all its theoretical occupation with the preservation and strengthening of tradition and *völkisch* peasant life, it seems that the pendulum swung towards the "modern" side after all, thus leading to an extent to the ever-feared urbanization.<sup>445,446</sup>

<sup>445</sup> See Gustavo Corni, *Brot, Butter, Kanonen : die Ernährungswirtschaft in Deutschland unter der Diktatur Hitlers* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 225. Likewise, Wolfgang Kaschuba and Carola Lipp, in their ethnographical study about the Nazi takeover in the German village of Dellingen, come to the conclusion of KdF's village work being predominantly modern in its execution: Wolfgang Kaschuba and Carola Lipp, "Kein Volk steht auf, kein Sturm bricht los: Stationen dörflichen Lebens auf dem Weg in den Faschismus," in *Terror und Hoffnung in Deutschland 1933-1945: Leben im Faschismus*, ed. Johannes Beck et al. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1980), 111–150.

<sup>446</sup> One practical example of KdF's "modern" work in the countryside in the cultural sphere is its

Generally, it appears that the overall ambivalence between tradition and modernity in KdF's work in the countryside was never fully resolved. To an extent, this ambiguity mirrors a tension that prevailed throughout the entire agricultural sector of Nazi Germany, and according to some historians, in the Third Reich as a whole.<sup>447</sup> Nazi politics was affected by a dualism between ideological motives and economic interests, and by an ongoing struggle between the proponents of both camps. In the sphere of agriculture, Darré clearly represented the ideological faction, and thus his policies clashed with those who were oriented to economic concerns and promoted a modernization of German agriculture. Gustavo Corni summarized the developments in German agriculture as follows:

Right from the start, the notion of idealistic sacrifice was an intrinsic part of the *Blut und Boden* ideology, which rejected all forms of economic logic. Shortly after being appointed Minister, Darré declared: "A farmer must always consider his activity as a duty towards his family and his people, and never simply an economic venture from which he can earn money. " [...] But after 1936/37 [the situation changed] With the beginning of the Four-Year-Plan the intrinsic ambivalence, present from the outset in the organization of German agriculture, definitely disappeared: the mixture of self-management and authoritarianism was now clearly replaced by state dirigisme which increasingly responded to the growing military needs. [Gustavo Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants: Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930-1939* (New York: Berg, 1990), 250.]

Corni says that there was a shift from a more ideological to an economically-focused German agriculture under the Nazis, accompanying (or rather causing) Darré's loss of power in this sector. KdF in the countryside was set up, however, under Darré's auspices

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employment of the *Reichstheaterzug* in rural Germany. I have discussed KdF's usage of this mobile theatre in my first chapter. As mentioned, the leisure organization was particularly proud of the modern technology this "train" embodied and of how it helped them in their effort to entertain the German people. (Cf. BArch NS 15/47; "Deutsche Arbeiter schaffen den ersten deutschen Theaterzug," *Der Deutsche*, Berlin, Jun. 10, 1934.")

<sup>447</sup> For a review on the historiographical debate on the role of modernity in the Third Reich see Riccardo Bavaj, *Die Ambivalenz der Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Eine Bilanz der Forschung* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2003).

and thus still bore the imprint of the “ideological” outlook of German agricultural policy inaugurated by him, at least in theory. However, given the leisure organization’s general stance, which was oriented more towards modernity, one needs to emphasize that KdF’s work in the countryside took place at the very crux of that dualism; a fact that most likely affected its work and its success.

On a more abstract level, there was less ambiguity. KdF’s overall ambition in the countryside was the creation of a “beautiful village, in a National Socialist sense, which is to say a village beautiful in its exterior and interior, a village economically, socially and culturally exemplary, which in its total community life is an expression of the National Socialist weltanschauung.”<sup>448</sup> To a large extent, the leisure organization’s general rural goals were the same as those we have encountered before with regards to Germany’s urban population. Just like factories, villages should be clean: through their beautification efforts, KdF hoped to remove both material and spiritual “filth;” it wanted to bring a “sense of order, cleanliness, usefulness and beauty”<sup>449</sup> into the villages, since for KdF it was “the clean and life-enjoying [*lebensfrohe*] village, wherein a lively and outgoing village community lives [...]”<sup>450</sup> Thus, at the basis of KdF’s work in the villages, as in other areas, lay the concern to create and strengthen a feeling of community and *esprit de corps*.

Exploring the cleaning and beautification campaigns for German villages points to a polycratic struggle between Nazi authorities – as can be discerned quite often in the

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<sup>448</sup> BArch NS 22/ 553; Franz Gutmiedl, *Die Dorfverschönerungsaktion der NSG “Kraft durch Freude.”*

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 30.

history of the Third Reich. KdF was not the sole organizer of such beautification undertakings. The German district authorities – first on an individual level out of local initiatives, then broadly administered through the *Gauämter für Kommunalpolitik* [Gau Departments for Communal Politics] – had also undertaken *Dorfverschönerungsaktionen*. As a result, local authorities and KdF were in constant competition and conflict. Many letters from representatives of Departments for Communal Politics complained about KdF's (or DAF's<sup>451</sup>) meddling in the field of village beautifications and other activities in the countryside.<sup>452</sup> Local authorities were mostly upset that although they did the actual work and provided the money, it was KdF which would win public recognition for the results.<sup>453,454</sup>

There are other relevant aspects of the broader history of Nazi Germany that an analysis of KdF's beautification campaign highlights. KdF's beautification campaigns should be considered together with the Nazi plans for settlements, especially in the East, even though the leisure organization was not actively involved in those. One of the

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<sup>451</sup> While some of the texts name the German Labor Front rather than KdF in their complaints, it is very probable that the authors do indeed mean *Kraft durch Freude*, but refer to it via its head organization, DAF.

<sup>452</sup> See, for example, BArch NS 25/ 1666, pag. 7; letter from the Amt für Kommunalpolitik Kassel, Hesse, to NSDAP Hauptamt für Kommunalpolitik from July 26, 1938 ; BArch NS 25/ 1291, pag 17; the letter from Dr. Steimle to Reichsamtsleiter Dr. Kerber from Sep. 6, 1941; ;BArch NS 25/1266, pag. 27; “Aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht des Gauamtes für Kommunalpolitik des Gau Mecklenburg für Juli/ August 1941”; and BArch NS 25/1249, pag. 64; letter from Dr. Mayer, Amt für Kommunapolitik, Niederdonau to Hauptamt für Kommunalpolitik from Oct/ 16, 1939.

<sup>453</sup> See BArch NS 25/ 1218, pag. 126; letter from the Gauamt für Kommunalpolitik to the NSDAP Hauptamt für Kommunalpolitik Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein, from May 26, 1942.

<sup>454</sup> This conflict between different Nazi party institutions about social work in the German village seems never to have been resolved. A final decision about who was in charge of the village beautification campaigns had been postponed until after the war. (See BArch NS 25/ 1249, pag. 67; letter from Dr. Storr to the Gauamt für Kommunalpolitik Ostpreussen from Oct. 17, 1939.) On the polycratic struggle in the field of cultural education work in Nazi Germany, see Volker Dahm, “Nationale Einheit und partikuläre Vielfalt. Zur Frage der kulturpolitischen Gleichschaltung im Dritten Reich,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 43, no. 2 (April 1995): 221–265.

crucial features of National Socialist ideology was the claim that the German race needed more *Lebensraum* [living space] in order to fulfill its potential as a superior race. This additional living space would be gained by territorial expansion, mainly into Eastern European territories. Following war, occupation, destruction and enslavement of the native people of these countries, the Nazis next envisioned repopulating the newly-acquired space with Germans and setting up village settlements.<sup>455</sup> Several National Socialist organizations were involved in these settlement activities, such as the *SS-Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt* [SS Race and Settlement Main Office,] which was headed from 1931 to 1938 by Darré and was thus dominated by “blood and soil” ideas,<sup>456</sup> or the *Hauptamt Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, or *VoMi* [Main Welfare Office for Ethnic Germans,] and the *RKFDV* office, [*Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums*; Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Ethnic Stock under Heinrich Himmler,] which superseded it.<sup>457,458</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> On Nazi resettlement policy, see Robert Koehl, *R.K.F.D.V.: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939-1945*. (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 1957). Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik: Die Zusammenarbeit von Wehrmacht, Wirtschaft und SS*, Originalausg. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991).; Bruno Wasser, *Himmlers Raumplanung im Osten* (Birkhäuser, 1993). Czesław Madajczyk, *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (Munich ; New Providence: Saur, 1994). Ihor Kamenetsky, *Secret Nazi Plans for Eastern Europe; a Study of Lebensraum Policies* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961). Isabel Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut: das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003). Uwe Mai, “Rasse und Raum”: Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002). On specifically agriculture-oriented planning, see Michael Hartenstein, *Neue Dorflandschaften: Nationalsozialistische Siedlungsplanung in den “eingegliederten Ostgebieten” 1939 bis 1944* (Berlin: Köster, 1998). For plans about German farmers’ settlement in the Western occupied zones, see Hans Schaefer, *Bürckels Bauernsiedlung: Nationalsozialistische Siedlungspolitik in Lothringen während der “verschleierte” Annexion 1940-1944* (Saarbrücken: Pirrot, 1997). For similar Nazi plans about settlements of German farmers within Germany, as part of an “internal colonization,” see Jan Smit, *Neubildung deutschen Bauerntums: Innere Kolonisation im Dritten Reich: Fallstudien in Schleswig-Holstein* (Kassel: Gesamthochschulbibliothek, 1983).

<sup>456</sup> Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik*, 83.

<sup>457</sup> For *VoMi* and *RKFDV*, cf. Koehl, *R.k.f.d.v.* and Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

The agencies active in the planning and implementation of Nazi settlements shared with KdF and its beautification campaigns the goal of establishing clearly-structured, orderly and clean villages as an environment for German peasant life rooted in *völkisch* traditions and National Socialist ideology. As with KdF, there is in the Nazi settlement planning a discernible emphasis on building and strengthening community feelings within the villages. This was to be achieved mainly through architecture. A directive by Himmler as *RKF DV* from November 1940 ordered that settlement villages in the East should be built with several community facilities, including, for example, a building of the party office with a room for celebrations, and a village inn with a hall and buildings where physical exercise would take place.<sup>459</sup> Additionally, there are reports about the arrangement of “Cheerful Village Evenings” in order to entertain new colonizers in Nazi settlement villages and to enlarge their sense of community and belonging together.<sup>460</sup> The parallels to KdF activities are remarkable.

Although KdF was not part of the regime’s settlement plans and practices in the East, it seems that this was not intended to be a permanent situation. Eventually, the leisure organization was to be active in Germany’s new *Lebensraum* and its settlements. For example, Hitler stated in a monologue concerning Germany’s occupied territories in

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<sup>458</sup> The German Labor Front, too, was involved in the organization of German settlements in the East, at least in the theoretical planning (see Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik*, 83.). As in other areas in the Third Reich, there was a polycratic struggle about who was in charge of the settlement policies. For the German Labor Front, it was its *Arbeitswissenschaftliches Institut* (Labor Science Institute) which was active here. I could not find any evidence that KdF as another sub-department of the German Labor Front was also involved in this area of settlement planning.

<sup>459</sup> “*Allgemeine Anordnung Nr. 7/11 des Reichsführers SS Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*,” November 26, 1940, *Grundsätze und Richtlinien für den ländlichen Aufbau in den neuen Ostgebieten*,” quoted after Hartenstein, *Neue Dorflandschaften*, 95.

<sup>460</sup> Wasser, *Himmlers Raumplanung im Osten*, 220.

the East on October 17, 1941:

I probably will not live to see it anymore, but in twenty years the area will contain over 20 million people. In three hundred years, it will be a blossoming parkland of exceptional beauty. [...] Ley's final task will be to remove the lethargy of the minor-key dominating in the East: beautiful gardens, fruit trees, fields, a land about which one will be able to write "sour weeks, cheery festivities."<sup>461</sup> [Czesław Madajczyk, *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (Munich ; New Providence: Saur, 1994), 24f.]

Hitler's explicit reference to Ley and his task of bringing happiness and cleanliness to the East should surely be understood as an instruction for the German Labor Front, and its sub-departments KdF and "Beauty of Labor," to become active in the newly-occupied zones and the German settlements there, at least after the war. Similarly, KdF is listed as an institution to be involved in "Cultural Compensation Measures" in *Settlement and Agriculture in the Annexed Eastern Territories of Upper Silesia* written by SS-man Fritz Arlt in 1942.<sup>462,463</sup> These references and points of encounter speak to the centrality of KdF's mission within the Third Reich. It also shows how basic assumptions and goals

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<sup>461</sup> Hitler alludes here to a line from Johann Wolfgang Goethe's ballad *Der Schätzgräber* (1797): "Saure Wochen! Frohe Feste!" It is possible that by using this quotation he wanted to imply that Nazi Germany's occupation in the East would lead to the introduction of a new, better work ethic. The line recited by Hitler follows in Goethe's ballad after "Tages Arbeit, abends Gäste!" ("Work during the day, guests in the evening!")

<sup>462</sup> Fritz Arlt, *Siedlung und Landwirtschaft in den eingegliederten Gebieten Oberschlesiens* (Berlin: Dt. Landbuchh. Sohnrey, 1942), 55. From 1940 on, Arlt was Himmler's RKFDV representative for Upper-Silesia. (See Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 102f.)

<sup>463</sup> Another, more indirect deployment of KdF in the Nazis occupied areas in the East was to use KdF's travel activities as a means for Germans to explore the newly acquired East and adjacent areas in order to display the "backwardness" of this territory and the necessity for the Nazi authorities to "civilize" it. In the words of Gerhard Ziegler, a Nazi settlement planner in Silesia: "One could see in Silesia, like nowhere else in the Reich, the almost incredible decline of civilization from this German cultivated landscape to the Polish one. One should actually bring half of the people once on a KdF trip from West to East, on a route of not much more than 100 kilometers, i.e. approximately from the branches of the High Ash Mountains [*Altwatergebirge*] to Bendzin. On such a trip, almost no words would be required to make the difference clear for everyone between a German order of space and a Polish one. This is where one automatically understands what kind of task we will be facing when reforming the Eastern territories into German areas." (Quoted after Hartenstein, *Neue Dorflandschaften*, 32.) While there were KdF trips to Silesia, I did not find any evidence that they were ever outlined or used in the manner suggested by Ziegler.



underlying KdF's work were not limited to the organization, but instead have to be understood as a part of larger discourses in which several Nazi agencies and consequent policies were embedded.

The implementation and reception of KdF's work in the countryside can only be suggestive, given the scarcity of source material in this realm. But it is apparent – and important – that KdF's cultural offerings in the countryside did not always meet with immediate interest or achieve high participation rates. The situation in Kalenberg in Northern Germany might very well be representative. A report from 1937 informs us that in the predominantly rural Kalenberg in the *Gau* South-Hanover-Brunswick, KdF first had a hard time finding any participants for its leisure offerings. Over the years, however, Kalenberg's population would be convinced, and by 1937, the leisure organization's events were in full swing: the report records 5 poetry evenings, 57 theater performances, one concert, 40 folk festivals, 44 village evenings, of which 24 included performances of professional artists, and 12 sites for which the Institute for the Education of the People arranged classes and lectures.<sup>464</sup> The report announced proudly that there had even been some farmers who had decided to go on vacation with KdF.<sup>465</sup> However, despite KdF's growing effort in rural Germany, and even though this appears to have begun in many

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<sup>464</sup> NHStA, VVP 17 Nr. 2457.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid. This report contradicts the claim made by Theresia Bauer that German peasants did not participate in KdF travel. (See Bauer, *Nationalsozialistische Agrarpolitik und bäuerliches Verhalten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 194.). KdF trips were indeed open to farmers, as well as workers, and some went. But their number was small, probably due to the inflexibility of farmers to go on pre-arranged trips and the difficulties it caused to leave their farms behind. This might have very well caused hard feelings amongst farmers and other inhabitants of the countryside. In conversation, my grandmother, who grew up in rural Silesia, told me that while there was no KdF for her family and her neighbors, they would see KdF trains with tourists passing by. Her father would always ridicule the “lazy people” going on vacation or complain about them. Such reactions might be born of resentment and jealousy, given that he himself was not able to go on such a trip.

German regions well before its “official” inauguration in 1937, some “blank areas” remained on the map of leisure organization events. In December 1941, for example, a letter by the KdF department of the *Gau Oberdonau* [Upper Danube] in Bavaria complained that there are still villages without their own KdF representative in its district and, consequently, without any KdF events. The letter urged change in this situation by May 1942.<sup>466</sup> Likewise, in her testimony given as part of a 1990 oral history project, Frau G. said that she did not know of any KdF happening in her village.<sup>467</sup> KdF’s “coverage” of the countryside, we can see here, was not very comprehensive or totalitarian and did not correspond to the scale of activities that KdF had suggested in its programmatic writings.

In fact, if we turn to propagandistic writings from KdF about the implementation and reception of its work, we encounter a portrayal of the leisure organization’s work in the countryside as much more successful. By 1938, a year after its official beginning, KdF’s work was in full swing in each German *Gau* according to the 1939 KdF book *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, which summarized in great detail the organizations’ work in the different German districts. Some of these reports contained statistical information. The *Gau Westphalia-North*, for example, claimed to have arranged the following in 1938: 47 village evenings and 10 “homeland evenings,” 139 theater performances, consisting of folk and amateur plays, 37 marionette and puppet shows, 95 fairs, 97 singing events and 17 dancing events, as well as support for the founding of 25 singing communities, 121

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<sup>466</sup> BArch NS 5 I /246; Gau-Sammelrundschriften der DAF Gauverwaltung Oberdonau, Hauptabteilung Gauwart KdF, Dec. 13, 1941.

<sup>467</sup> Transcript of interview with Frau G. and Frau S. on Nov. 21, 1990 and Feb. 19, 1991 (Archiv “Dt. Gedächtnis.” Full names known to author, shortened in compliance with anonymization regulations.)

folk theater groups and 49 dancing groups. The more rural *Gau* Württemberg-Hohenzollern in the South West of Germany reported even higher numbers: here KdF claimed the organization of, amongst other things, 130 village evenings with over 20,000 people attending, 78 folk or amateur plays with over 50,000 participants, 79 singing events with more than 23,000, and 35 reading evenings with over 9,000 people attending. Furthermore, there were 234 singing and 217 music groups, 565 amateur theater and 580 dancing groups, altogether encompassing over 28,000 participants. As generally with KdF propaganda, these numbers may well be significantly inflated. However, they demonstrate both the breadth of activities KdF at least claimed to have organized in rural Germany just one year into their official activity, as well as their apparent numeric success, with the presumption that KdF's reports probably bore some relation to reality, and at least indicated the situation as KdF would have liked it to be.<sup>468</sup>

Reports from the Security Service allow some additional, albeit not particularly comprehensive, insight into the implementation and reception of KdF's work in rural Germany after 1937. For example, they refer to the *Dorfgemeinschaftsabende* arranged by KdF; reports from 1940 for the German regions of Westphalia, Swabia and Silesia relate that these evenings enjoyed a particular success and would be "very suitable to significantly boost the community feeling of a village community."<sup>469</sup> Thus, the reception

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<sup>468</sup> See Hirschfeld, *Die Betreuung des Dorfes*, 72 and 75.

<sup>469</sup> *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 9.9. 1940 (Nr. 112), Zur kulturellen Betreuung der Landbevölkerung BA Rch R 58/ 154, pag. 55). Similar positive feedback can also be found for in SD reports for Koblenz, see Peter Brommer and Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz., *Die Partei hört mit: Lageberichte und andere Meldungen des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS aus dem Grossraum Koblenz, 1937-1941* (Koblenz: Verlag der Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz, 1988), 73. ( 8th report from Jan. 29, 1938 for January 1938.)

A similar evaluation can be found in reports for the next year; here, the Security Service's *Meldungen aus dem Reich* informs us that "the success of such evenings, if led cleverly, is often one hundred percent." [Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938 – 1945. Die geheimen*

of these evenings resembles outcomes of similar events in urban settings suggests that the evenings were popular and worked – according to KdF’s plan – towards the building of community.

Another similarity between KdF’s rural and urban work is that there were recurring instances of criticism about the quality of KdF entertainment’s performances. Germans in the countryside generally expressed gratitude about KdF’s work in their home villages and throughout the entire *Reich*, theatrical performances organized by the leisure organization were very popular. However, Security Service reports also indicate the rural population’s increasing wariness towards “second rate” theater plays. Cabaret and vaudeville performances in the villages were met with even more disapproval. Villagers complained that these events were “simply copied from the city to the countryside,” without showing any respect “for the mentality of the rural population.” According to reports gathered in Frankfurt, Neustettin, Graz, Koblenz, Linz and other places, the rural population disapproved of “half-naked dames [*Weiber*]” “mean jokes” and inappropriate bawdy and political humor by emcees at KdF vaudeville evenings.<sup>470</sup> The reports clarified that high attendance numbers should not at all be read as a sign that the rural communities were satisfied with these events, but should rather be understood as the simple result of the villagers’ lack of choices with regards to entertainment.

KdF’s goals for (cultural) leisure events for the countryside reflect a heightened concern with *völkisch* art and performances. However, sources on the reception of KdF

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*Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS*, Volume 6, (Herrsching 1984), 1996.]

<sup>470</sup> A report from Dresden warned that eventually this situation would enhance and endure the “cultural influence [...] defined by the church and [other] outdated associations.” (BArch R 58/ 154, pag. 53-5; “Meldungen aus dem Reich, 9.9. 1940, Nr. 112, Zur kulturellen Betreuung der Landbevölkerung.”)

events in villages suggest that this was not (fully) implemented. In 1940, the SD detected an ongoing “demand for events rooted in folklore” in the German countryside.<sup>471</sup> A positive evaluation of KdF folk events can be found in a Security Service report from December 1941.<sup>472</sup> This suggests that KdF was not acting entirely against audiences’ wishes with its programs.

There is another aspect of the reception of KdF’s events that seems to be in agreement with what KdF set out to do. Feedback found in Security Service reports mirrored KdF’s worries about events being ‘too urban’ and at the same time apparently confirmed that the leisure organization was successful in its work, often fulfilling both the aims of community building and of entertaining the rural population. However, there is also evidence that at times, KdF’s work in the countryside was somewhat counterproductive and destructive towards the creation and maintenance of a strong village community, in fact achieving exactly the opposite. A 1941 SD report, for example, diagnoses a “symptom of an interior crisis of the rural cultural life,” claiming to have received notice on this “concordantly from all areas of the Reich.” The symptom was that “the old cultural life, rooted to the soil, which the former homeland and village clubs cultivated, is vanishing more and more [...]” Instead of fixing this, the report alleges, KdF was in fact causing it, since “the place of events in the countryside actively growing out of the village community is being taken by KdF playing groups, by the *Gau*

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<sup>471</sup> The Security Service had gathered information affirming this assessment in several regions, such as Silesia, Bavaria, Franconia, Bohemia and Westphalia. (Cf. *ibid.*)

<sup>472</sup> However, this report still also featured ongoing complaints about events that were ‘too urban’ for the countryside, especially regarding vaudeville entertainments, the demand for which the report identified as decreasing. (Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 3048. The report refers to a similar criticism from December 1940.)

movie posts, by the *Volksbildungswerk* or by other [...] events, which are now received by the rural population very passively without any [...] productivity of their own [...].”<sup>473</sup> This description suggests that KdF’s work in the countryside, which was often quite intrusive and characterized by very regulated events imposed from the top down could be significantly counterproductive at times. Instead of the desired community building and strengthening of the village, there is a clear indication that KdF events might (sometimes) actually have led to a destruction of older associations and more traditional village life.<sup>474</sup> In that light, the warnings found in KdF publications about avoiding its activities being too urban so as not to promote the flight from the land should be read as reactions to actual leisure organization events and their effects, and not merely as prudent cautions.<sup>475</sup>

Lastly, an analysis of sources on the reception of KdF’s rural work confirms claims made by the leisure organization in its publications about its continuing efforts in the countryside after the beginning of the war. KdF’s work in the countryside did not cease after September 1939.<sup>476</sup> However, the war did lead to a limitation of KdF’s activities in the countryside; a 1941 Security Service report highlights that the leisure

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<sup>473</sup> Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938 – 1945*, 1995; according to the SD report, the latter criticism was raised particularly by the Saxonia *Gau* and rural areas around Hamburg, Neustettin and Nuremberg.

<sup>474</sup> Of course, the destruction of associations was not something KdF was opposed to; it corresponded with the idea of Nazi *Gleichschaltung*.

<sup>475</sup> Generally, KdF’s work did not manage to halt emigration from rural Germany to the cities, as John E. Farquharson summarizes in his book on agriculture in Germany. He points out that “statistics indicate that the efforts were on a small-scale, had little effect, and however admirable in themselves simply could not compensate for overwork and poor financial rewards.” Accordingly, the *Landflucht* continued, as “other sectors of the economy really offered [...] more money for less work.” [John E Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-45* (London: Sage Publications, 1976), 192.]

<sup>476</sup> According to a February 1941 report, this work was much appreciated by the rural population. (See Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 1995.)

organization's work suffered from a "lack of staff members due to the war."<sup>477</sup> In addition, KdF's rural activities were restricted during the war, and most likely also beforehand, due to a shortage of appropriate rooms as venues. During the war, the Nazi government lacked the means – and possibly also the necessary willingness – to correct this issue on a broad scale, so it was postponed for afterwards.<sup>478</sup>

Generally, the reception of KdF's work in German villages has confirmed some claims by the organization about its practices in its writings. Overall, the organization's outlook in rural Germany was in some regards quite different from for other areas. KdF's work in rural Germany appears to be much more "ideologized." Its sports offerings, village community evenings and beautification programs were all clearly aimed at the (re)creation of an ideal village life according to "blood and soil" ideas. It seems that in the countryside, KdF was directly and openly engaged in disseminating Nazi ideology; at least it certainly did not shy away from openly connecting its work to such ideological contents.<sup>479</sup>

That KdF's rural activities were directly and openly ideological can be understood in several ways. It might be due to Darré's strong ideological influence on Nazi politics on the countryside and the fact that KdF as a sub-department of the German Labor Front was more malleable in its policies in the rural sphere, given that it was not its primary

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 3049.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid. My material on KdF's war activities, both originating with the leisure organization itself and found in the reports of the Security Service, only goes up to 1941. The absence of material for the following war years might suggest that KdF's activities in the countryside had ceased or at least been substantially constrained. Of course, however, the lack of material is not conclusive evidence for such a development.

<sup>479</sup> My reservation in making this claim is due to the fact that most of my analysis in this chapter is based on what KdF said it wanted to do. However, even on this programmatic level, such open subscribing to Nazi politics is unique and could not be found in any "theoretical" writing or guidelines concerning KdF's work for the urban working class.

environment. A different reading, giving more agency to KdF's organizers, would be that there was less fear of "scaring away" potential participants with an over-ideological orientation to its leisure activities. In other words, it could be explained as a result of KdF not fearing any opposition to Nazi politics and ideology in the countryside, by comparison to elsewhere. Accordingly, this reading would suggest that it considered rural Germany as a site where it could act "freely" to use its offerings to promote National Socialist ideas. In that sense, in terms of defining the leisure organization as a whole, one could argue that in the German countryside the "real KdF" becomes apparent – or what KdF could have been in other areas if there had not been an assumption of potential opposition and a danger of "scaring people away."

However, I would suggest that such an interpretation is misguided, because KdF's work in rural Germany must be seen as a "special case" and so should not be taken as evidence towards an interpretation of KdF as a whole. Instead, the history of KdF in the countryside has to be considered as a case of an ideological take-over by other, stronger discursive forces, although these were, of course, not necessarily alien to the leisure organization. That this was made possible had to do with the fact that KdF was not *per se* interested in the countryside – it was not a core part of its founding agenda. When entering the rural sphere, it was thus relatively unprepared. Additionally, there was already a strong, powerful discourse operating in the rural area, that of "blood-and-soil", which could easily be adapted. I am not arguing that KdF was "taken over" by other organizations or circles within the Third Reich – even though Darré's influence should not be underrated. Rather, I suggest that KdF, being a comparatively "blank" slate in terms of having a fully-fledged approach to rural Germany, was "filled in" with



prevailing ideas. In other words, the strong ideological outlook of KdF in the countryside shows that the leisure organization was – quite naturally – following the ideological “mainstream” of Nazi Germany. It does not, however, suggest that KdF overall should be seen as a purely ideology-driven organization with the only (or even the main) goal of disseminating this ideology. KdF was eager to strengthen Nazi Germany, but this more through their project of “making Germans happy” than through pure imposition of Nazi ideology. In the German countryside, it appears as if KdF organizers and especially theorists acted on the belief that the happiness of the German rural population was only to be achieved by helping realize “blood and soil” ideas in the villages. All KdF activities in the villages were thus to be imbued with this ideology. Of course, most of my chapter is an analysis of KdF leisure initiatives as prescribed in the theoretical writings about these activities in the countryside. It cannot be assumed that the actual practice in the German villages was identical with this, and in particular it might be very well that the “blood and soil” component existed mainly in the written work of KdF.<sup>480</sup> To answer this question, a more in-depth analysis of the implementation and reception of KdF’s work would be necessary.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> For a more general evaluation of the German peasantry's ambiguous reception of the “blood and soil” elements inherent in the Nazi cultural and symbolic politics in the countryside – not limited to KdF –, see Beatrix Herlemann, *Der Bauer klebt am Hergebrachten: Bäuerliche Verhaltensweisen unterm Nationalsozialismus auf dem Gebiet des heutigen Landes Niedersachsen* (Hannover: Hahn, 1993), 223–233. Herlemann argues that German farmers often mocked the blood and soil ideology, and that it was not very popular (Ibid., 224.). Daniela Munkel reaches a similar conclusion. She ascertains that the Nazis' peasant ideology was only partially adopted by German farmers, “not because the peasants had something against the idealized valorization of their profession – the opposite was the case –, but because ideology and propaganda could not withstand the test of reality.” (Daniela Munkel, *Nationalsozialistische Agrarpolitik und Bauernalltag* (Frankfurt ; New York: Campus, 1996), 368.)

<sup>481</sup> A lack of sources did not allow me to conduct such in-depth study. My brief analysis of these aspects of implementation and reception, however, uncovers that the outcomes of its work were rather mixed. KdF appears to have been less popular in the countryside than in other arenas. This is surely partly a result of its later, and lesser, engagement in this area. But it may also be the case because of its open and somewhat heavy ideological investment. Additionally, it is more than imaginable that KdF’s rather aggressive

My study of KdF's (conceptualization of its) work in the countryside sees this area emerge as an "exception," which in turn helps us to perceive aspects of KdF's work in urban settings more clearly. However, there are also general conclusions about KdF as a whole, which are visible in its work in the countryside. My investigation of KdF activities in villages highlights an ongoing tension between modernity and tradition, between modernization and the dissemination of "blood and soil" ideology. This tension may have been starkest in the countryside, because KdF's ideological component is most open here, but it is a general feature of the leisure organization's history. Likewise, this chapter's analysis of KdF's rural activities has shown –again – the organization's fundamental investment in the building of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft*, as well as its concern to "civilize", "clean" and "purify" the German people, the *Volkskörper*. To achieve this, KdF assumed micro-managing and highly invasive practices, trying to minutely control and form details of (German farmers') private lives. These are recurring themes in my analysis of different areas of KdF activity so that an exploration of the "specifics" of its work in German villages highlights and expands our understanding of the Nazi leisure organization as a whole.

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approach of "micro-managing" village populations' everyday lives and their environments, based on a clearly stated 'civilizing effort' did not sit well with the villagers. Here, it is certainly conceivable that their attitudes did not differ much from these highlighted in the previous chapter, which also portrayed KdF's – unsolicited – entry in the field of leisure (in the industrial sphere.)

### PART III

#### “KdF at War”

CHAPTER FIVE  
KdF's 'Warfare for Joy':  
Entertainment for the *Wehrmacht* and for Occupied Europe

Else Wendel, who had worked in a KdF office responsible for factory exhibitions, writes the following in her memoir about her boss at the beginning of World War II:

Mr. Wolter was now busier than ever. He had been instructed to develop plans for a peaceful penetration of the newly won territory and to send to the "General Government of Poland" picture exhibitions of our usual style. It meant more staff, more travelling, and more exhibition walls. It was not easy, especially the question who should be in charge of the new Polish factory exhibitions. [Else Wendel and Eileen Winncroft, *Hausfrau at War: A German woman's account of life in Hitler's Reich* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994), 40.]

As we can tell from this excerpt, the start of World War II in 1939 led to an extension of KdF's work. This was not an entirely uncontested development, KdF was very much active ensuring its continuous existence, and successfully so. But what exactly happened to KdF during the war? Did the new situation change KdF's goals, outlook and activities? And what can we learn from studying KdF during this period for our overall understanding of the leisure organization in the Third Reich?

Under taking its own 'warfare for joy,' KdF participated in the German war effort. How did KdF adapt its work to the new war situation? KdF extended its activities, becoming one of the chief providers of troop entertainment for German front soldiers<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> KdF was not the only agency involved in entertaining German soldiers during World War II. In addition, the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, the Reich Culture Chamber, as well as the *Wehrmacht* itself, provided troop entertainment. For a comprehensive history of German troop entertainment during World War II, see Frank Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe: Die Truppenbetreuung in der Wehrmacht 1939-1945* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2005). Alexander Hirt's unpublished dissertation compares British and German troop entertainment during World War II. (Alexander Hirt, "Die Heimat reicht der Front die Hand." *Kulturelle Truppenbetreuung im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939 - 1945. Ein deutsch-englischer Vergleich*, 2009. On British and American troop

and also eagerly following the *Wehrmacht* into newly-occupied “German” areas, in order to bring its leisure events to the Ethnic German population living there – the new responsibilities of Frau Wendel’s boss, Mr. Wolters, would have been part of this latter work. Thus, KdF’s presence at the front in German-occupied territories opened up new audiences for its activities. These audiences extend KdF’s already existing roles of providing entertainment and building community. In fact, KdF’s “warfare for joy” led it to develop new variations within this role, such as new types of community building, between troops at the front and people at home, or between Reich-Germans and Ethnic Germans. Although KdF responded to these new roles with new activities as the situation demanded – providing, for example, hospital entertainment to injured soldiers – it is clear that the central concerns of the organization remained much the same, oriented mostly towards fun. Even in these new circumstances, KdF stuck to its commitment to “joy production.” KdF’s events for Wehrmacht soldiers, especially, were mostly light, amusing events.<sup>483</sup> In addition, activities for Ethnic Germans reveal how KdF’s work was driven by an urge to “civilize” through leisure – not unlike its prewar programs for German workers and, especially, to the inhabitants of the German countryside. Such processes ultimately failed, however, or rather, were given up in favor of KdF’s other goal of “joy production” – even though the former goal was still among KdF’s stated

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entertainment, see Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh: Entertaining the British and American Armed Forces, 1939-1946* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s, 1978).

<sup>483</sup> I do not mean to argue that there was no indoctrination of German Wehrmacht soldiers at the front. For the Eastern Front, Omer Bartov has convincingly demonstrated that “not only was there a continuous stream of propaganda and indoctrination, but that the soldiers actually wanted it and were thankful when it was intensified in the light of the deteriorating military situation [...]” [Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 98.] However, as I will show in this chapter, KdF was not the site or source of this stream of political propaganda or indoctrination, but rather focused on the organization of purely entertaining events.

goals in its propaganda.

In the context of war, criticisms of and institutional pressure on KdF tended to increase. Goebbels and his ministry spearheaded this. Their worries about KdF's approach to culture, entertainment and to Germanness only increased. Additionally, KdF now had to respond to criticisms from, for example, the *Wehrmacht*, and to criticisms made about its activities in new contexts, such as its image towards non-Germans. KdF was mainly faulted for bringing the wrong sort of culture and entertainment to its audiences. While a lack of resources, resulting from the new demands of war, offers an explanation for this, most of the aspects of KdF being criticized were results of the organization's conscious decisions – such as employing amateur artists – decisions based on its overall convictions (that conveniently also happened to be cost-efficient.) The increasing criticism of KdF should be read as evidence for its commitment to the overall project of bringing joy to soldiers and ethnic Germans. Overall, we can see that if anything, the leisure organization simply ignored these external criticisms.

This chapter will first briefly discuss how KdF self-represented its role during the war, that is how it took on the persona of an active, caring, mobile entertainer, following the individual German soldier into the most remote places, making itself into his faithful comrade-in-arms and, thus, an overall indispensable part of the German war effort. The question of what KdF wanted to achieve will then persist through the entire chapter and discussions of various forms of activity in the two general areas of troop entertainment and leisure activities for Ethnic Germans in occupied Europe. The second part of the chapter, however, will also be concerned to discuss what KdF's actually *did* and to what extent this agreed with its goals. This analysis will uncover a strong commitment to “joy

production,” but also show that a certain “civilizing “ and “Germanizing” effort was prominent among KdF’s goals but was very much less pronounced in its actual doings. Finally, this chapter will deal with the artists who worked for KdF – including the issue of the “misbehaving female artist” (in the eyes of KdF’s critics.) On one level, this section will function to cover the third stage of the general three-tier-stage that my dissertation is involved regarding to KdF – *viz.*, looking at what the organization wanted, what it did, and what effects it had. In addition, it shows that what artists did on behalf of KdF was far removed from the process of disseminating any political content.

In its public self-representation of its role in the war, KdF portrayed itself as an indispensable collaborator in Germany’s war effort. Its primary goal in the area of troop entertainment was to connect *Wehrmacht* soldiers and their fighting closely to Germany’s sphere of culture. In this, it saw itself as a necessary facilitator; it wanted to realize the link between culture and soldiers and further strengthen it:

Not only does the German soldier fight for the valuable goods of German culture; this culture also accompanies him in the field. It strengthens and fortifies him in his will for battle [*Kampfeswillen*] and ties a close, friendly bond between him and his homeland. For this glorious war task, no effort and work is too much. Despite impassable roads, despite the snow and cold, the line of KdF-events always moves forward just behind the fighting front. [Bodo Lafferentz, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude im Kriegsjahr 1941* (Verl. d. Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1942), 2.]

KdF – and the artists it employed to entertain German soldiers – are attributed here almost the same status as soldiers or warriors.<sup>484</sup> After 1939, the war effort had become the most important aspect of German life, and KdF meant to be a part of it. Such argumentation, as presented here by KdF’s director, Bodo Lafferentz, also served to rebuff any claims that there was no space for leisure and entertainment during times of

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<sup>484</sup> This statement also reveals KdF’s emphasis on cultural, “ideal” values, rather than on materialistic incentives.

war.<sup>485</sup>

Naturally, *Arbeitertum*, the KdF magazine, was also very much involved in this endeavor to present the leisure organization as an essential institution in wartime Germany. For example, its 1940 article on KdF's entertainment of German sailors summarizes, rather bombastically, the character and goal of organized leisure during World War II. The state of war did not lead to questions about "still having KdF,"

**"Humor and High Spirits are the Best Comrades:"**

Figure 5.1 Cover page from a 1939 *Arbeitertum* issue, caption: "*Humor und gute Laune sind die besten Kameraden.*" [English translation above.]

This cover page is a good example of the magazine's emphasis on happy soldiers who enjoy KdF's entertainment. According to the caption, this is an audience to a performance of the Reichstheaterzug, KdF's Mobile Theater, in Eastern Europe.

("Humor und gute Laune sind die besten Kameraden: Mit dem Reichstheaterzug in den Standorten des Ostens," *Arbeitertum*, Nov. 15, 1939, cover page.)



suggested the article, but rather, the work of KdF was now needed "now more than ever." Again, KdF is presented here as the German

soldier's comrade-in-arms: "KdF wants to be your comrade, who accompanies you in your free time and in this way wants to assist you, when you are fulfilling your duty to the people and the *Führer*."<sup>486</sup> Overall, KdF's troop entertainment activities are described as a manifestation of an emerged Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, and its work for soldiers is considered "in the deepest sense of the word nothing other than community coming to the

<sup>485</sup> Bodo Lafferentz (1897-1974 ) had been head of KdF's travel department since 1933. He became executive director of all of KdF after the first director, Horst Dreßler-Andréß, had been suspended from his position in September of 1936. (IfZ Munich, F 104.)

<sup>486</sup> Draudt, "KdF betreut die Kriegsmarine," *Arbeitertum*, Apr. 1, 1940, 5.



fore: all for one and one for all.”<sup>487</sup>

As part of KdF’s lobbying for its continued existence after the beginning of World War II, *Arbeitertum* focused its reporting on troop entertainment and often embellished its articles with pictures (see above), delivering to its readers tales of happy, entertained soldiers and committed artists.<sup>488</sup> Many *Arbeitertum* articles featured remote but romantic places as the locations of KdF’s entertainment activities. For example, a 1940 article about KdF’s “taking care of the German navy” opens by evoking: “Somewhere close to the ocean, far away from any village or town, there is a lone tower on a beach, which gives refuge to a small cohort of sailors, who are here quietly on their war duty.” For these sailor-soldiers, the largest challenge is the quiet and monotony they face while serving at this remote post, according to this article. It presents KdF’s activities – even when they are only conducted by a small ensemble of five vaudeville performers – as a crucial remedy against the boredom and *ennui* the soldiers might otherwise suffer. The article also emphasized how difficult it was for the artists to reach such remote locations, and how, on several occasions, bad weather and snow nearly prevented them from getting there. When the artists finally succeeded, however, their

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> German soldiers should not be shown enjoying “too much” happiness, however, at least if such happiness might have been of the alcoholic kind, something which could not always be ruled out for KdF events. Apparently, this was the case for a KdF event in 1936: a trip to Norway organized by KdF’s Travel Department for German workers and soldiers produced a picture of a very happy but probably intoxicated soldier which was subsequently published in an issue of the magazine *Wehrarbeit*. The War Ministry was not amused with this “hardly nice” [“wenig schön”] picture, which showed the soldier in a “rather un-military state,” as the ministry put it in complaint letter from August 1936. While generally permitting images of participating soldiers at KdF events, the War Ministry demanded that pictures which could potentially harm the reputation of the *Wehrmacht* should not be published. (BArch RW 6/ 177 [Freiburg]; letter by the War Ministry to the editors of the magazine *Wehrarbeit* from Aug. 22, 1936.) The photo just mentioned was of a soldier at a KdF event, happily dancing and singing while he tightly embraced a young woman, a scene that apparently did not belong in the *Wehrmacht*’s self-image of strength, sincerity and masculine virtue. In other words, a display of too much happiness was considered damaging towards the reputation of the German army.

performances were met with the soldiers' "grateful joy."<sup>489</sup>

Exact place names were often omitted in these articles, further stressing the impression that KdF went literally to the "end of the world" where – as with the solitary tower near the ocean – locations were merely identified as lonely sites. Another 1940 article displays a bunker which was located "somewhere in the loneliness," but where "men of the German Institute of the Education of the People stop by from time to time to bring instruction and animation to 'field grays.'"<sup>490</sup> Overall, *Arbeitertum* aimed to disseminate the understanding that KdF went as far as possible in its attempts to bring joy, and subsequently strength, to German soldiers, wherever in the world they might be located. A prime example of KdF's extensive reach was its activities in Africa – even though apparently these mostly amounted to the work of a sole artist, the magician Marvelli.<sup>491</sup> The pictures below from a KdF publication document Marvelli's work in Africa. KdF's ability to set up "entertainment spaces everywhere, even in the African desert" is emphasized – the caption reading: "The desert stage [...] somewhere in Africa [...] An audience room conjured [*herbeigezaubert*] from jerry cans and boxes."<sup>492</sup> – and such efforts are shown to have the desired effects, demonstrated by the laughter and

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<sup>489</sup> Draudt, "KdF betreut die Kriegsmarine," *Arbeitertum*, Apr. 1940, 4 -5.

<sup>490</sup> Herbert Leisegang, "Soldaten erweitern ihr Wissen: Das Deutsche Volksbildungswerk hilft dabei," *Arbeitertum*, May 15, 7. ("Feldgrau" ["field grays"] was a term for German soldiers.)

<sup>491</sup> See Bodo Lafferentz, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude im Kriegsjahr 1941* (Verl. d. Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1942). Lafferentz explicitly refers to Marvelli's dispatch to Africa, which seems to have been a direct reaction to an express wish by General Rommel to have KdF's Leisure Time Department "cultural caretaking" of soldiers deployed in Africa during the summer of 1941. Due to the difficult transportation situation, KdF sent only individual artists to Africa, i.e. those whose acts did not require them to bring much equipment. Accordingly, the first artists there were an accordion player (who was also a baritone) and the magician Marvelli; see Geerte Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg: Deutsches und Alliiertes Fronttheater* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992), 153.

<sup>492</sup> Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude, *Die KdF-Truppenbetreuung* (Berlin, 1941), 17.

smiles of a soldier pictured looking on.

KdF's extensive reach when it came to front entertainment was also boasted about by KdF director Lafferentz:

At every location where a German soldier is stationed today [...] KdF is with him. Far up north, where our work is welcomed doubly gladly and gratefully now during the polar night, under Africa's scorching sun, in the East, which opens up more day by day, in France, Belgium, Denmark, in Holland, Serbia, in Greece or on Crete – [KdF events for soldiers are] everywhere [...]. The spaces of our caretaking work are extending by the same degree that our armies advance victoriously. The impassable roads, a feature of the former Poland, [and] Norway's mountains, snow and coldness, have long been displaced by Russia's swampy, muddy paths. And despite this: evening for evening, the homeland speaks to the German soldier in the sign of the sunwheel. [Lafferentz, quoted after Frank Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe: Die Truppenbetreuung in der Wehrmacht 1939-1945* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2005), 82. ]

In its war-time public representation, especially in *Arbeitertum* articles, KdF anthropomorphized itself, making itself into a comrade-in arms, or rather, “comrade-in-joy,” following and supporting the individual German soldier in the most distant places. In other words, KdF equated itself with its traveling artists, thus emphasizing its active involvement and presence at the front.

What was the scope and content of KdF's “comradeship-like” activities in the arena of troop entertainment? During the first two years of the war, KdF hired over 4,000 artists to entertain German soldiers. It also sent its *Reichstheaterzug* out to the front; the mobile theater traveled over 130,000 km between 1939 and 1941. In addition, KdF established hotels and homes for its traveling artists all over occupied Europe, including cities such as Lille, Bordeaux, Paris, Riga, Warsaw, Krakow, Belgrade, Athens, and Oslo. By 1941, KdF's artists even reached the African front – though, merely in the form of individual performers or small groups of artists.<sup>493</sup> According to scholar Hans Daiber, the

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<sup>493</sup> See previous footnote.



**“From the Diary of the Desert Magician Marvelli:”**

Fig. 5.2 KdF’s leisure work in the African desert [Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude, *Die KdF-Truppenbetreuung* (Berlin, 1941), 17.]

number of KdF’s organized events for the *Wehrmacht* rose from 250,000 in 1941 to 570,000 in 1942, reaching an alleged audience of almost 200 million.<sup>494</sup> And KdF’s efforts in the entertainment of German troops were not limited to (cultural) leisure time events. KdF’s Institute for the Education of the People [*Volksbildungswerk*] was also active in the entertainment of German soldiers at the front, instructing or equipping soldiers in ways that enabled them to be creatively active while away at the front. For example, the *Volksbildungswerk* offered crafts, modeling and painting and

transported around twenty tons of tools to the front in order to enable creative activities for soldiers. In the winter of 1940/41, KdF’s *Volksbildungswerk* was officially put in charge of this task by the *Wehrmacht*.

But the overall responsibility for all leisure events remained with the *Wehrmacht*. Their implementation was the task of KdF, together with the *Wehrmacht*’s propaganda department, the latter being in charge of the commercial handling of the events. The

<sup>494</sup> See Hans Daiber, *Schaufenster der Diktatur: Theater im Machtbereich Hitlers* (Stuttgart: Neske, 1995), 310. Daiber, 310. On the participation numbers, Daiber writes: “The overall number of spectators was in 1942 allegedly 189 million. It had been 30 million in 1940 and 90 million in 1941.” (Ibid.)

arrangements of details on the ground – such as preparing the individual events, notifying the soldiers and arranging safety measures – were in the hands of local army commanders. Leisure events for soldiers were to take place weekly<sup>495</sup> and included theater, vaudeville, and cabaret performances, concerts, social evenings or *völkisch* and amateur art. All were free of charge for soldiers; soldiers, however, were officially obliged to participate – something that went against KdF's general principles of voluntary participation.<sup>496</sup> By October 1941, KdF's activities had expanded to entertain German soldiers in twelve different geographical areas; it now organized events for soldiers at the Western Front (divided into two sectors, *Westen I* and *Westen II*), in Italy, Norway, in the Southeast, Denmark, Holland, Africa, at the Eastern Front (divided into three sections; A, B and C),<sup>497</sup> as well as for soldiers and workers involved with the *Organisation Todt*, which was building the Siegfried Line and the Atlantic Wall. Overall, 163 ensembles were touring on behalf of KdF at that point.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> It was KdF's goal to provide each German soldier with a cultural evening event every other week; see Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 329.

<sup>496</sup> BAarch RH 26-556-50 [Freiburg]; "Merkblatt. Geistige Betreuung der Truppe- Veranstaltungen," 556<sup>th</sup> Division, Apr. 24, 1940. It was also apparently anticipated by the *Wehrmacht* and KdF that the latter point would not always be followed: the bulletin's section on attendance stipulated that civilians would be allowed to visit the leisure events "in the case of low participation [by soldiers.]" (Ibid.)

<sup>497</sup> Overall, there was comparatively less troop entertainment on the Eastern Front. Vossler refers to the East as KdF's "Achilles' Heel" territory. (Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 323. See also Hirt, *Kulturelle Truppenbetreuung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 56. Hirt notes a similar pattern in German troop entertainment during World War I.) During the beginning of 1942, only 55 out of 251 KdF troupes were sent to the occupied Soviet Union; in the summer of that year, the number of performances was still insufficient. In 1943, however, KdF intensified its efforts to "bring joy" to German soldiers in the East: more than half of all KdF artist troupes were now sent to the Eastern Front and to Finland. (See Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 322 f.)

<sup>498</sup> I have reached this total by simply adding together all of the ensembles; however, some of them were active at several places; so effectively, the number might have been greater than 163.

One of the main components of KdF's work for soldiers during World War II was front theater; accordingly, this is a good topic to begin with in an analysis of KdF's troop entertainment. Indeed, KdF was the first and predominant player in Nazi Germany when it came to front theater.<sup>499</sup> By November 1939, KdF already ran ten stages "with great success" at the western front.<sup>500</sup> However, KdF's early "supremacy" in the realm of front theater was quickly contested, especially by Joseph Goebbels and his Ministry of Propaganda.<sup>501</sup> This was rooted in a continuing deep dissatisfaction with KdF's cultural activities: Goebbels and his ministry deemed the leisure organization's theatrical and vaudeville performances as lacking any quality. Eventually, Ley and Goebbels signed an agreement leading to the foundation of a "*Sonderreferat Truppenbetreuung*" – this

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<sup>499</sup> See Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 102. KdF's advance in this area – the leisure organization was considerably ahead of other Nazi agencies and state ministries, such as Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry or the *Amt Rosenberg* – can be explained by KdF's pre-war involvement in organizing mobile theaters. Before the war, the leisure organization had already arranged large-scale theater performances for workers building the *Autobahn* and the Siegfried Line, workers employed by the Reich Labor Service, as well as German soldiers. Prior to the war, this entertainment for soldiers was based on an agreement between the *Wehrmacht* and KdF, which put the latter in charge of organizing leisure activities for soldiers in army homes. For example, KdF hired the ensemble of Cologne's popular "Millowitsch Theater," led by the later famous artist Willy Millowitsch, to perform for Siegfried Line workers; after the beginning of the war, this engagement was changed and the troupe toured France and Belgium, the last time in 1944; see Dorothea Renckhoff, *Willy Millowitsch: Lebensbilder, Theaterbilder* (Cologne: Wienand, 1996), 36 f. On KdF's pre-war work at the Siegfried Line and the rivalry there between the organization and Goebbel's Ministry, see also Daiber, *Schaufenster der Diktatur*, 310.

<sup>500</sup> SD-report from Nov. 8, 1939, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich* (Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), 433. KdF also utilized the *Reichstheaterzug* mobile theater in its effort to entertain the civilian population, especially those living in more rural areas. Thus, once World War II began, KdF had a head start when it came to the organization of front theater entertainment for soldiers.

<sup>501</sup> Already in the first week of the war an entry in Goebbels's diary alludes to a conflict between KdF and the Ministry of Propaganda regarding competences and responsibilities in the realm of the troop entertainment. Goebbels notes that, so far, no agreement with the KdF about front theater had been reached, and he adds, "KdF tries to pull the initiative away from us [in this matter]." As we know, KdF was indeed successful in becoming the main organizer of front theater. Two days later, on October 8th, Goebbels refers in his diary to a meeting he had with KdF's head, Robert Ley. Troop entertainment was on the agenda, and, in his eyes, an agreement was reached: "I will do the planning and KdF will do the execution. We will start immediately on a grand scale." (Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998) Part I, vol 7, 143.

appears to have been an in an attempt to settle this conflict but was ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>502</sup> Overall, what we see here is that disagreements existed about what kinds of art or culture were appropriate for German soldiers.

A closer look at the execution of KdF's front theater helps to understand what was at the bottom of this conflict. According to Geerte Murmann's study on front theater, the putting together of a theater ensemble for KdF's troop entertainment usually unfolded as follows: KdF first hired artists through several agencies it had contracts with. Then a "pleasant program" was put together, and after rehearsal, it was sometimes "performed for a 'Gold Pheasant.'"<sup>503</sup> The head of the assembled theater group was then informed (by the nearest KdF office) of the places and army units that its troupe was to visit, whereon the troupe "left together, often by train, into the occupied territories. Sometimes, [however] the engaged artists only met abroad."<sup>504</sup> This description reveals how KdF was barely involved in decisions about the content of the performances staged under its name. There was no micro-managing of this sphere. Dissemination of particular content could

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<sup>502</sup> However, the agreement did not fully clarify the situation. Instead, as it was so frequently the case in the polycratically-structured Third Reich, front theater remained in a state of chaotic competition. In fact, all areas of troop entertainment were beset by this competition and fierce rivalries between KdF, the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda and the Reich Cultural Chamber, despite several official agreements between the different agencies. (See Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 149 f.) Geerte Murmann remarks on this: "A colorful, disorderly coexistence of troop entertainments of all kinds unfolded. KdF and the troop entertainment under Goebbels developed gradually first into secret and later into open rivals. KdF had in fact the lion's share of the organization, but did not limit itself to 'executing' that which was conceived by Goebbel's *Sonderreferat*; conversely, it sent it own stages with their own programming, which it often had put together by agencies for guest performances, it also had its own theaters and acrobatic troupes, put together in pre-war years, under contract. When it came to the content of the programs, the Reich Theater Chamber wanted to have a say, too, and did so. At the same time, Rosenberg's surveillance authorities were alert, too. (Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 102.)

<sup>503</sup> Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 121. see also Daiber, *Schaufenster der Diktatur*, 310. In German: "*Goldfasan*;" this was a derogative term for a Nazi party functionary, referring to the ostentatious display of many ribbons and medals, with as much gold as possible.

<sup>504</sup> Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 121.

thus not have been a priority for KdF; political education of any kind was not what KdF focused on in its (cultural) troop entertainment. Rather, it was interested in entertainment and “joy production;” reaching as many German soldiers at the front as possible. This general orientation was at the core of the disagreement between KdF on the one hand, and Goebbels’s ministry and Rosenberg’s department, on the other. KdF’s emphasis on joy weakened or often eclipsed any function toward national or even national socialist education that was desired by the former. Related to this, KdF’s “hands-off” approach in organizing leisure for the front – here theater – further upset the leisure organization’s critics, since this meant that many of its programs were not checked for the quality expected by these critics – both in regards to content (no “high culture”) and professional performance standards. KdF’s critics worried both about German’s reputation abroad as well as the impact on German soldiers. KdF, however, stuck to its emphasis on joy when organizing front theater.<sup>505</sup>

The Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda harshly criticized KdF’s front theater. After some initial concerns, Goebbels had actually been tangibly enthusiastic about the leisure organization’s new task of arranging troop entertainment in his diary, and he also seems initially to be quite satisfied with KdF’s activities.<sup>506</sup> By

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<sup>505</sup> A German war correspondent expressed exactly this in 1940, observing that KdF saw it as the task of front theater “to dissolve that severity and strictness, which had been [cut into soldiers’ faces by] the fighting... Secondly, at quieter moments, its task is to bring beneficial diversion into the monotony of service, and in that manner to keep the balance between the stressed and the momentarily relaxed forces.” The soldierly audience was “first perhaps still a little tired, but then quickly “revived” due to the front theater. The correspondent says that now, “‘Strength through Joy’ had now found its actual task;” [article by magazine *Die Bühne* from Feb. 23, 1940, quoted after Dorothea Kolland, “Faust, Soldatenlieder und ‘Wunschkonzert’: Deutsche Frontbetreuung,” ed. Dorothea Kolland and Puppentheater-Museum (Berlin) (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1997), 40.]

<sup>506</sup> On November 28, 1939, he writes, for example, about a KdF event in Berlin’s *Theater des Volkes*: “Good speeches by Ley and me. [...] Great voices of the *Staatsoper* [singers] and a very relaxed cheerful concluding part. Many soldiers, workers and artists. One returns home in the evening really well charged.”



spring 1940, however, he started to grow more critical. On April 24, for example, his diary stated that in the realm of troop entertainment “one has to make sure of a better standard.”<sup>507</sup> A later entry from December 4, 1940 indicates the conflict between Goebbels’s ministry and KdF was getting more severe. (“KdF tries to get the better of us.”).<sup>508</sup> Two days later, we can find the following entry in his diary:

People lament that KdF events are of too low a standard and that its emcees tell too many dirty jokes. In addition, a great deal of naked dancing is exported to the countryside, which is entirely absurd. I intervene energetically, not to be moralizing, but out of concerns for good taste. [Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998)., Part I, vol. 9, 37; entry from Dec. 6, 1940.]

However, Goebbels’s criticism and interventions led neither to structural change nor a modification in the quality of leisure events, not on this occasion, and not in respect to later interventions.<sup>509</sup>

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On December 16, he expresses his satisfaction about a first mobile front library set up by KdF with the Propaganda Ministry’s support: “I am very content. It will produce much joy.” (Entries from Nov. 28, 1939 and Dec. 16, 1939; Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher* Part I, vol. 7, 214, and Part I, vol. 7, 233.)

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., Part I, vol. 8, 70.; entry from Apr. 24, 1940.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., Part I, vol. 9, 31.; entry from Dec. 3, 1940. In the German original, Goebbels uses the expression: “*K.d.F. sucht uns die Butter vom Brot zu kratzen.*” [KdF tries to steal from us the butter off the bread.]

<sup>509</sup> Later diary entries mirror this criticism. By 1943, Goebbels appears to have become somewhat resigned to problems with the standard of KdF events; nevertheless, reflecting on a discussion about troop entertainment, he writes that in the East “its standard has dropped gravely, in particular because of measures undertaken by the KdF;” but adds, “But right now, I do not see any way to change that.” (Ibid., Part II, Vol. 7, 100.; entry from Jan. 12, 1943.) Later that year Goebbels even expressed understanding for KdF’s failings, granting that “KdF tries hard in this area [of troop entertainment].” For its failures, he blames circumstances rather than the organization itself: “Unfortunately, the demands are so high that from time to time cheap goods are brought to the men. But something like that is unavoidable in such a substantial undertaking.” (Ibid., Part II, Vol. 8, 320.; entry from May 18, 1943.) However, by spring of 1944, Goebbels was no longer conciliatory or passive. After a sequence of increasingly dramatic critiques of KdF (for example, *see* Ibid., Part II, Vol. 8, 491; Part II, Vol. 11, 490 and 582; and Part II, Bd. 12, 54 and 59; entries from Mar. 16 and 30, 1944, Apr. 4 and 6, 1944 and Jun. 18, 1943, respectively), and referring to documents about KdF troop entertainment that are characterized as “outright horrific,” (Ibid., Part II, vol. 12, 68; entry from Apr. 7, 1944) Goebbels decided on a “series of examinations, which shall determine who is actually qualified for troop entertainment and who is not.” (Ibid., Part II, Vol. 12, 116 f.; entry from Apr. 4, 1944.) I did not find any documents proving that such examinations actually took place. In the summer of 1944, however, Goebbels issued a decree stipulating that KdF cultural events, especially social evenings, should be less “vulgar” and were not to include dirty jokes. (BArch R 56 I/37; pag. 15;

We can read Goebbels's ongoing criticism of KdF's troop entertainment as evidence of KdF's strong emphasis on entertainment (and its neglect of political or ideological content) – something also supported by KdF's programs for soldiers and in occupied Europe, which I will look at presently. This is not to say that KdF's performances and programs were not at times (or even often) of non-professional quality. For, example, in early 1944, alerted by complaints about KdF's programs for soldiers, an investigation into how these were executed in Pomerania was launched,<sup>510</sup> and its results were “shocking:” the report noted that out of five programs that were inspected on “the first day [...] three were in such a [bad] state, that the *Wehrmacht* flatly rejected their approval.” *Gau* authorities also rejected the program of a traveling troupe intended for a camp of resettlers. The artists hired by KdF for this activity were especially criticized, for it was “totally unacceptable” that these were “let lose on humankind.” The report doubted their professionalism, suspecting “that those running around as [female] dancers, accordionists, or so-called singers have, in a work-shy manner, run away from some work place without any preparation or training” [as performers]. The report also raised another a common criticism of KdF artists when it decried their salaries:<sup>511</sup> “It is madness to pay

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decree by Goebbels, reproduced in a letter from Jul. 20, 1944 to the heads of all propaganda departments; Goebbels's text is reproduced and discussed in chapter six.)

<sup>510</sup> Some of the complaints in this specific case came from the *Wehrmacht*, which had diagnosed “an artistic inferiority” in the leisure events, where “ability is often [...] replaced by dirty jokes.” According to a report by the Reich Culture Chamber, the *Wehrmacht* could not take this any longer (BArch R 56 I/ 37, pag. 30; “Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat Februar Gau Pommern” The text is not signed nor is its author indicated in any other way, but its format suggests that it was an excerpt from a report by the *Sicherheitsdienst* of the SS.)

<sup>511</sup> Wages for KdF front artists were an ongoing point of contention during the war. Joseph Goebbels's diary, and other sources from his ministry or from the Reich Culture Chamber contain many references and complaints about the excessive wages paid to KdF artists; Goebbels even refers to them several times as “war profiteers” (for example, see Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher* Part I, vol. 8, 344, Part II, vol. 3, 376f., Part II, vol. 8, 514, Part II, vol. 10, 106, and Part II, vol. 12, 54.; entries from Sept.19, 1940, Feb.26, 1942, Jun. 23, 1943, Oct. 10, 1943, and Apr.4, 1944.) This topic's continuing recurrence shows that Goebbels was not

40 RM to a female dancer, who does not much more than show naked flesh with more or less graceful prancing around.”<sup>512</sup>

In fact, the longer the war lasted, the more the standards of KdF events seem to have dropped. One reason for this was that fewer and fewer artists were available, since they were now increasingly being drafted.<sup>513</sup> To compensate, “KdF tried [attracting artists] with high salaries,” much to the chagrin of the *Wehrmacht*, which had to pay the bills. As Murmann points out: “One took whomever one could get, and those were not exactly top performers.” But, “lots of money for very weak performances, this set in motion a contrary movement: the stopping of pay, which again scared off the last good artists.”<sup>514</sup>

To overcome such shortages of professional performers, KdF increasingly cast amateur artists. For KdF, this might also have appeared as a good strategy to avoid

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successful in solving the issue, despite his ongoing outrage. According to the entry from Feb. 26, 1942, a front artist could receive up to 500 *Reichsmark* for one evenings’ performance. (On conflicts about front artist salaries, see also Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 290 f.) Goebbels decried the fact that front artists, such as a “simple ballet dancer,” might make more money than an army colonel at the front. (Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher* Part II, vol. 11, 592.; entry from Mar. 30, 1944.) To counteract such developments, Goebbels decreed several pay cuts and artist salary caps, but apparently without any significant success; see, for example, Goebbels’s diary entry from June 21, 1942, where he announces that the maximum wage for front artists will be fixed at 800 RM (*Ibid.*, Part II, vol. 5, 161); in an earlier entry from October 1940, he mentions that he was to set 2,000 RM as the highest possible monthly income of a front artist.

<sup>512</sup> The report concluded by expressing the discontent of the *Wehrmacht* officer in charge, who “declared that in the future one would rather abstain from KdF-events for months than again confront one’s soldiers with such rubbish” (BArch R 56 I/ 37, pag. 30; “Auszug aus dem Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat Februar Gau Pommern.”) The report points to the negative effects such blunderings by KdF would have on the Nazi party’s overall reputation. In this view, low-quality KdF events would cause a “heavy damage” to the image of the party.

<sup>513</sup> On the situation of artists in the Third Reich and the “God-gifted list” of artists exempt from military mobilization, see Oliver Rathkolb, *Führertreu und gottbegnadet: Künstlereliten im Dritten Reich* (Wien: ÖBV, 1991).

<sup>514</sup> Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 223.

ongoing conflicts with Goebbels' ministry about the costs and wages for performers.<sup>515</sup> A 1941 *Arbeitertum* article, "Kabarett der Namenlosen" ["Cabaret of Those Without Names,"] profiles such an amateur ensemble. We learn about a group of men and women who are workers in Germany's armament industry, in this case in the Magdeburg region, and who spend their free time performing for German soldiers as singers, magicians, dancers, comedians, musicians or acrobats.<sup>516</sup> A later *Arbeitertum* article introduces KdF's "Studio of Free Time" ["Freizeitstudio"] in Berlin, the central casting and distribution agency for the amateur performers who would go on to perform for German soldiers, armament workers or in military hospitals.<sup>517</sup> Reputedly, KdF did not have to advertise this new opportunity for amateur artists very much. Interested performers quickly started to sign up en masse to be hired to perform for KdF. Of course, much of this would be down to the ambitions of individual artists' and their desire to perform. However, I would suggest that this positive response to the opportunity to perform –

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<sup>515</sup> On the flip side, of course, this procedure did not help to alleviate complaints from the same critics about the quality of KdF's cultural events, but might rather have had the opposite effect.

<sup>516</sup> See "Das 'Kabarett der Namenlosen,'" *Arbeitertum*, Nov. 15, 1941, rear page. In this case, these "artists" would perform for (wounded or vacationing) soldiers back in Germany.

Intriguingly, another text with the same title was written by the German author Erich Kästner in 1929 about what Kästner calls "the craziest institution one could possibly conceive," a cabaret club in Berlin where, each Monday night, the stage was given over to amateur artists. Kästner describes how the real purpose of the evening is to ridicule the performers, comparing it to a Roman gladiatorial arena: "people come here to pull out all the stops and let themselves go [...] People unconsciously subject themselves to a psychoanalytic cure here. They are cured of the usual base instincts by allowing them free rein [...] The small room lined with tables from which wine and champagne are being drunk resounds with jokes, insults, and insolences of all sorts." [Quoted after Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (University of California Press, 1995), 563.] It is quite interesting that KdF should here duplicate one of the most extreme forms of "Weimar culture," Nazi disdain for it. Furthermore, Kästner's report raises questions whether similar ridicule was not also directed at KdF's amateur artists – and then if this might even satisfy KdF as actual "joy production"?

<sup>517</sup> See Ursula Haver, "Musterung der Namenlosen: Das Freizeitstudio der NS-Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude' sucht Künstler für die Truppenbetreuung," *Arbeitertum*, Apr. 1, 1943, 8-9.

unpaid<sup>518</sup> and on top of their regular work in 1943, that is in the depths of the war – also reflects a belief among the volunteers in (the necessity of) “joy production,” as well as in the work and continuous existence of KdF itself. KdF’s popularity is also evident – people wanted to be part of it. Lastly, the article’s title is notable: “*Musterung der Namenlosen*.” This title likens the casting of “nameless” [*namenlos*] artists to a military muster. Clearly, the performers and their work are being likened and linked to the selfless military service of soldiers. This supports my earlier point that KdF presented itself and its artists as “comrades” to the German soldiers. In other words, “joy production” by (amateur) artists – and, on a more general level, by KdF – is presented as part of the fight for German victory.<sup>519,520</sup>

KdF’s engaging of amateur artists was also driven by economic motives. This fiscal gain, however, was more of a positive “side effect” than KdF’s main motivation. More important for KdF was that through amateur artists, several of its main principles and goals could be realized. First, this was active “art production” from normal people. Second, civilians from the home front and soldiers were brought together, in line with the aim of “community building.” Altogether, these positive outcomes of amateur art and its

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<sup>518</sup> The performers did not receive any salary, as far as I could determine.

<sup>519</sup> Another *Arbeitertum* article from 1943 describes, in text and pictures, the first performance of a group of amateurs recruited by the KdF *Freizeitstudio* to entertain German soldiers in Dresden. (See Ursula Haver, “Die Probe aufs Exempel: Amateure spielen vor Soldaten,” *Arbeitertum*, May 15, 1943, 6.)

<sup>520</sup> However, while KdF constantly stressed the importance of “joy production” in its events and publications, there were attempts by others to curb enthusiasm and excessive happiness, and, most importantly, the display of both. This was especially the case during the later war years. For example, Martin Bormann decreed the following order for the Nazi party on July 28, 1944: On behalf of the *Führer*, I command: it is very important to ensure that merry, alcohol-related sessions after meetings etc. do not happen. Our people does not – rightly so – appreciate that behavior during this time, which demands the complete exertion of all strength and total war effort. (BArch NS 6/347; order by Martin Bormann, head of the Nazi Party-Chancellery from Jul. 28, 1944, re: “Kameradschaftliche Veranstaltungen.”)

“joy production” trumped for KdF any shortcomings there might have been in regard to quality. KdF’s casting of amateur artists – and the way this was “celebrated” in its publications – speaks to KdF’s commitment in bringing any kind of amusement to as many people as possible, rather than in limiting its offerings to ensure a time- and money-consuming quality control.

What *exactly* Kdf did do for soldiers during World War II?. I will examine KdF programs for German soldiers, scrutinizing examples of several army units at different places and times in several different countries. Generally, we will see that the leisure organization’s work in this sphere was indeed driven by an urge to provide light entertainment for soldiers, rather than political education or an effort to bring classical, “high brow” German culture to the front.

The leisure organization commenced its work in the arena of troop entertainment shortly after the beginning of the war. KdF’s activities expanded, such that, by October 1941, the organization was entertaining German front soldiers in twelve different geographical zones, as well as soldiers and workers building the Siegfried Line and the Atlantic Wall, with KdF 163 ensembles on tour.<sup>521</sup> A cursory look at the genres and content of the programs involved already suggests that KdF’s work in the arena of troop entertainment as a strong focus on light entertainment, while it was less concerned with providing performances of “high brow” art. The majority of these programs were

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<sup>521</sup> The zones were: *Westen I* and *Westen II*, two sectors on the Western Front, Italy, Norway, the Southeast of Europe, Denmark, Holland, Africa, and three Eastern Front sectors (A, B and C). As noted before, there was comparatively less troop entertainment on the Eastern Front (only 55 out of 251 troupes at the beginning of 1942) although efforts to redress this intensified by 1943, when more than half of KdF troupes were in the East (see footnote 497). For the number of ensembles, see footnote 498.

concerts (44) and theatrical performances (42),<sup>522</sup> followed by twenty “social evenings,” twenty vaudeville performances, eighteen lectures, sixteen programs that explicitly offered “music, singing and dance,” eight cabaret shows, six opera programs, three magic shows and two puppet performances. KdF’s “joy focus” becomes even clearer when breaking down the 42 theater performances into their genres: nineteen were comedies,<sup>523</sup> thirteen were folkloristic ‘amusing stories,’ nine merited the label “*Schauspiel*” [drama,] but only one was a ‘tragedy’. Thus, KdF seems to have sacrificed the goal of “bringing culture,” putting the emphasis, instead, on easily accessible and amusing “joy production” – because only this, said KdF director Lafferentz in 1942, would “give the German worker and the German soldier the necessary strength that is rooted in the joy and the affirmation of life.”<sup>524</sup> In the eyes of KdF organizers and functionaries, only this commitment to producing joy would aid Germany’s overall war effort as much as possible. A German victory then in turn, would secure “happiness” for Germans, as masters of Europe, in a “Thousand Year Reich.”

This focus led to a heavy reliance on vaudeville performances in KdF’s entertainment for soldiers. An analysis of KdF’s events for one *Wehrmacht* division clearly supports this. From thirty-one KdF performances for the *Wehrmacht*’s Fourth Division in November 1940,<sup>525</sup> nineteen were vaudeville evenings,<sup>526</sup> the remaining ones

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<sup>522</sup> Here I refer to what the ensembles listed could offer. There were thus, for example 55 *distinct* musical programs offered, but most programs were of course performed several times. (Counting repeat performances, then, there may well have been more actual theater performances than concerts.)

<sup>523</sup> Of course, “comedies” could also refer to “high brow” plays. However, these would still be defined by the intent to evoke laughter, and it that manner fulfill KdF’s main goal.

<sup>524</sup> Lafferentz, *KdF im Kriegsjahr 1941*, 31.

<sup>525</sup> At this time, the division was stationed in Southern Germany.

consisted of theater performances by the *Oberdorfer Bühne*, which staged the play “*Ehestreik*” [“Marriage Strike”] twelve times. In the next month, December 1940, KdF maintained its focus on light entertainment; from twenty-eight events for soldiers of the Fourth Mountain Division, fourteen were vaudeville evenings. Nine of these were entitled “*Heitere Bühne*” [“The Cheerful Stage,”] one had the simple name “*Bunter Abend*,” another was called “*Lachende Kleinkunst*” [“Laughing Cabaret”], and three performances were staged by an ensemble named “*Die Bunkertruppe*” [“The Bunker Troupe”]. These clearly merry performances were complemented by theater and concert performances, which were also mostly light, entertaining pieces.<sup>527</sup>

The January 1941 program kept this focus on vaudeville – nineteen out of the overall thirty-two events for the soldiers of the Fourth Mountain Division were part of this genre, with the titles “*Freude und Lachen*” [“Joy and Laughter,” six performances,] “*Heiteres Kunterbunt*” [“Cheeful Motley,” two performances,] “*Tausend Takte Heiterkeit*” [“One Thousand Beats of Happiness,” one performance,] and “*Ein bunter Strauss*” [“A colorful Bunch,” two performances.]<sup>528</sup> And among fifty-six KdF events for the Fourth Mountain Division’s soldiers in February 1941, vaudeville was still the most common form of entertainment. Once again, the names of these vaudeville programs –

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<sup>526</sup> Twelve were staged by a theater troupe called “*Dürsplein*” and their program “*Alles in Ordnung*” [“Everything in Order”]; four were performed by the vaudeville-troupe *Maria Roland* and three others by an ensemble touring under the title “*Gross-Variete*” [“Large Vaudeville Show”] from their program “*Rythmus der Freuden*” [“Rhythm of Joy”] (See BArch RH 28/4/43 [Freiburg].)

<sup>527</sup> Of fourteen performances, four were by the Wuertemberg State Theater [*Württembergische Landesbühne*, with the play “*Dieses Wasser trink ich nicht*” [“I don’t drink this water”] twice, and Schiller’s “*Wallenstein*” twice, six by the “*Schwabenbühne*” [“Swabia Stage”] with the play “*Anna Susanna*,” and four were concerts by the Karlsruhe Chamber Orchestra. (See *Ibid.*)

<sup>528</sup> In addition, there were eight performances by a vaudeville troupe named “*Die 4 Phillips*” [“The Four Philips.”] The remaining thirteen events that month were theatrical performances by the “*Schwabenbühne Anna*.” (See *ibid.*)



“*Konfetti*” [“Confetti,” nine performances,] “*Bunter Abend*” [“Colorful Evening,” four performances,] “*Wohl bekomm’s*” [“Cheers!,” five performances,] “*Freude und Lachen*” [“Joy and Laughter,” fifteen performances] – evidence KdF’s emphasis on light entertainment and amusement. Theatrical performances, too, appear to have been on the light side of things: the *Stuttgarter Kammerspiele* performed a program of musical comedies three times, and a folklore theater ensemble (“*Bauernbühne*”) staged the play “*Das Herz in der Lederhos’n*” [“Heart in Lederhosen”] four times.<sup>529</sup> KdF organized only one “serious” event during February.<sup>530</sup>

This detailed overview of KdF’s events for the soldiers of the Fourth Mountain Division clearly shows the leisure organization’s strong commitment to light, amusing entertainment. This focus on entertainment also emerges in a sample analysis of KdF’s work for German soldiers in occupied countries.<sup>531,532</sup> Analyses of various programs for

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<sup>529</sup> The latter title hardly suggests the play should be considered part of Germany’s (highly-revered) canon of *Bildung*. Other KdF events for the Fourth Mountain Division in February 1941 were called “*Tanz, Musik und Gesang*” [“Dance, Music and Singing”]; this was probably a social evening, which took place seven times (at several locations) – or “*Ein lustiger Schwanknachmittag*” [“A Funny Afternoon of Amusing Stories”]. (See *ibid.*)

<sup>530</sup> On February 3rd and 4th, a Dr. Rössler gave two talks – on “Germany’s Colonial Course” and “Colonial and World Politics” – for the soldiers. (See BArch RH 28/4/43 [Freiburg].) In fact, this was only the second such event in the entire period of investigation, next to Schiller’s *Wallenstein*, performed in December 1940.

<sup>531</sup> For Denmark, for example, there are sources on tours by both the *Berolina-Kammer-Orchester* and the *Reichstheaterzug* in 1940. While the latter presented a “large vaudeville program,” the former staged the comedies *Der Herr Doktor Musin*” and “*Roman einer Waschküche*” [Novel of a Washhouse] – neither play can be counted as a building the canon of “high German culture.”

<sup>532</sup> In the occupied Netherlands, several traveling troupes were active on the behalf of KdF in 1944. Their programs included the musical comedy “*Eva im Abendkleid*” [“Eva in Evening Dress”] or the piece “*Philine*”, a “play for people in love,” by contemporary writer and comedian Jo Hanns Rösler; other programs were called “Butterfly and other familiar tunes” (including pieces from popular operas and operettas by, for example, Bizet, Puccini, Verdi, Strauss and Lehar), “From Mozart to Johann Strauss,” “*Das Notenkarussell*,” [“The Musical Carousel,”] “Dance, Singing and Humor for Eye and Ear” by a vaudeville theater, or “*Mädchenpensionat I*” [“The Finishing School I”] (BArch RW 37/29 [Freiburg], “Planungen für den Monat Juni, 1944.”) As this list illustrates, KdF’s programs for soldiers in the Netherlands focused on light entertainment and clearly aimed to provide comical relief.

*Wehrmacht* soldiers clearly suggests how much KdF focused on providing light, amusing entertainment for the troops. It also demonstrates that in its practices near the front, KdF did not fulfill the promise to have “the valuable goods of German culture” “accompan[y soldiers] in the field,” as, in 1942, KdF director Lafferentz had claimed his organization was doing.<sup>533</sup> The goal of bringing “high German culture” was certainly not fully met by events organized by the leisure organization.

While KdF’s programs for soldiers clearly suggest “light entertainment” was favored above sophisticated, “high brow culture,” it cannot be determined with this source basis whether light entertainment left space for Nazi political ideology and its dissemination. Clearly, Nazi ideology was crucial for the German war effort and the *Wehrmacht* overall.<sup>534</sup> For KdF, however, it was not so crucial; its “joy production” eclipsed this objective of disseminating Nazi ideology. Of course, entertainment in itself does not preclude political content; the light pieces performed on behalf of KdF might have been steeped in Nazi ideology. However, art produced in the Third Reich was predominantly not of that kind.<sup>535</sup> The war only increased the need for escapist pieces: even the “propaganda ministry emphasized entertainment at the expense of Nation Socialist Orthodoxy” once the war began.<sup>536</sup>

The target audience of this “joy production,” however, did not always react well.

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<sup>533</sup> Lafferentz, *KdF im Kriegjahr 1941*, 2. Lafferentz full statement was previously cited on page 239.

<sup>534</sup> For a discussion of how much the *Wehrmacht* was a “Nazi institution,” see Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>535</sup> As already discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, “only five to ten percent had such obvious [Nazi tendencies]. The majority of the artworks [...] produced in the Third Reich stayed mostly in the area of the non-political [...]” [Jost Hermand, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Primus, 2006), 132.]

<sup>536</sup> Martin Kitchen, *Nazi Germany at War* (London ; New York: Longman, 1995), 261.

One example of soldiers' discontent comes from a 1941 report from the 392<sup>nd</sup> Infantry regiment, then stationed in France. The report states "that the performances of flat vaudeville shows in unceasing repetition does not meet the soldiers' approval;" rather, their "wish for serious, valuable performances – good lectures, theater plays, comedies – is getting louder and louder."<sup>537</sup> While this type of reaction was not a singular occurrence,<sup>538</sup> it cannot be determined that this was indeed a majority opinion. Such negative responses, expressing disapproval similar to that of Goebbels discussed previously, support the overall thesis of this chapter in two interconnected manners. First, the recurring criticism about performances that are "too light" can be taken as further evidence that KdF events were indeed characterized by a focus on "joy production," insofar as this is captured in by "light entertainment" focus. Further, KdF hardly ever reacted to all these criticisms; instead, KdF rather stubbornly stuck to its agenda, sacrificing its other goal of "bringing high culture," without even being too bothered about damaging the party's image.

KdF's troop entertainment also included activities for wounded soldiers in military hospitals – and here, too, KdF's focus on "joy production" is discernible. Overall, entertainment for wounded soldiers was a novel field of activity for KdF that was directly motivated by the specific context of the war – it was thus one of the instances where the leisure organization extended its arsenal in an attempt to react to the

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<sup>537</sup> BArch, RH 26/169/93 (Freiburg); *Stimmungsbericht* by 392<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment from Jan. 25, 1941.

<sup>538</sup> Similar requests are also relayed in a different report from 1941, this time by the 220<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Battalion, which states that "the spiritual care-taking of the troops" [*geistige Betreuung der Truppe*] through KdF vaudeville performances seems to have led to an over-satiation with such performances among the soldiers; repeatedly, they had expressed desires for events of a different kind, such as theater performances or lectures. Ibid., *Stimmungsbericht* by the 230<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Battalion from Jan. 25, 1941.

necessities of war, while at the same time building on practices developed previously in the peace years. KdF preferred to employ small puppetry ensembles<sup>539</sup> or other small artist groups or individual artists in this sector due specifically to their mobility. Since these acts' equipment was not so extensive, they could easily perform in one hospital



#### KdF's Amateur Art and Handicrafts for Wounded Soldiers:

Fig. 5.3 Excerpt from an *Arbeiterum* article on KdF's taking care of wounded soldiers. The article's headline emphasizes, "This is the way KdF takes care of our wounded." The first caption explains that KdF allocated instruments to wounded soldiers who could play them, leading to the creation of "small orchestra communities, that bring joy to the other comrades. The second captions reads: "Others keep themselves busy with handicrafts, which are showed to them by female KdF helpers." (Herbert Leisegang, "So kümmert sich 'Kraft durch Freude' um unsere Verwundeten," *Arbeiterum*, Jun.1, 1940, 9.)

room, and then move quickly on to the next. However, KdF also organized large-scale cultural performances for wounded soldiers, often either in hospital assembly halls or in municipal theaters.<sup>540</sup> In addition, KdF also arranged amateur handicraft and artistic activities for wounded soldiers (see above.) This was based on experience the organization had previously gained through its work in German factories. Another aspect of KdF's work in German factories that was transferred into military hospitals was the schema of "factory exhibitions." The art displayed in such hospital exhibitions sometimes also contained works by front soldiers. In addition, KdF arranged for professional fine

<sup>539</sup> On puppet performers' popularity in military hospitals, see Ursula Bach, "'Denn wie man den Teufel wehrt, Hat Euer Kasper uns gelehrt': Puppenbühnen an der deutschen Front," in *FrontPuppenTheater: Puppenspieler im Kriegsgeschehen*, ed. Dorothea Kolland and Puppentheater-Museum, Berlin (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1997), 77.

<sup>540</sup> Wounded soldiers were also entertained at the Bayreuth Wagner festival from 1940 on; please see chapter six for a more detailed discussion of these *Kriegsfestspiele* in Bayreuth.

artists to visit military hospitals, where these artists would, for example, sketch portraits of the hospitalized soldiers. Generally, this could be considered simple distraction or amusement of soldiers who were bound to their hospital beds. KdF, however, framed such activities in a somewhat more grandiose manner: for the leisure organization, the artists' visits meant that fine art was brought to wounded soldiers, attempting to fulfill KdF's – often neglected – objective of “bringing culture” to the people.<sup>541</sup>

In its care for wounded soldiers, sports also became increasingly important for KdF. Its Sports Department employed sports teachers, often female, to direct exercises and gymnastics for wounded soldiers to speed up their recovery. This was based on an agreement from immediately after the beginning of the war, between the Sports Department and the *Wehrmacht*'s Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, which made all KdF sport teachers available to military hospitals; KdF's Sports Department offered workshops to prepare these teachers for this work. A 1940 *Arbeitertum* article quoted a KdF sports teacher in this program, who claimed that “not much [new] had to be learned” to run sports for wounded soldiers, since the previous “fresh-cheerful style of KdF's classes, [...] a lot of games and community work, hit the nail on the head here, too.” The sports classes' playfulness, in accordance with KdF's focus on “joy production,” is displayed in the pictures accompanying the article. The article also featured a statement by a participant, who said that he enjoyed the classes. However, he apparently also felt compelled to reinforce his masculinity in the midst of these games: “I would like to add that these hours [of sports] have shown us that we are still full men, and I myself have the

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<sup>541</sup> See Herbert Leisegang, “So kümmert sich “Kraft durch Freude” um unsere Verwundeten,” *Arbeitertum*, Jun. 1, 1940, 8.

strong belief that I will be back [at the front] for the final battle.”<sup>542</sup>

KdF's activities for wounded soldiers are a good example how the war led to an extension of the leisure organization's arsenal. At the same time, the pre-war experiences shaped this development significantly. Furthermore, KdF's offerings for wounded soldiers, especially in the arena of sports, suggest again KdF's focus on joy, despite potential misgivings about this among the targeted audience.



**Cheerful Sports for Wounded Soldiers:**

Fig. 5.4. Photograph from an *Arbeitertum* article on KdF sports for wounded soldiers. With photographs like this, *Arbeitertum* displayed the “joy production” KdF organized for wounded soldiers in the realm of sports. The caption reads “Happy Game in Light, Air and Sun promotes in the best manner the recovery of our wounded soldiers. (Alex Kayser, “Verwundete werden schneller gesund,” *Arbeitertum*, Jul. 15, 1940, 9.)

The account of one German soldier, Hans K., sheds light on *Wehrmacht* members' experiences with leisure time during the war. In his memoirs,<sup>543</sup> Hans K. describes how he and his fellow soldiers spent their free time during their deployment to the Eastern front:

In the hinterland, but also near the front, much was done to jolly the troops along. Often, we saw front theaters' performances, given by traveling ensembles. Native groups and singers performed, too. We listened to great Russian and Ukrainian choirs. Often, movies were screened. In the larger cities, there were homes for the *Wehrmacht*, which were a sort of restaurant for *Wehrmacht* members. In addition, however, an antenna was set up in every unit if there was an opportunity, in order to listen to “Lili Marleen,” sung by Lale Andersen, from the Radio Belgrade. Our battery had a small front library that also contained classical works. So, in quiet hours one read Hölderlin, Goethe or even Kant together with other comrades who were interested in this. Of course, the library was overall not used very much. On occasion, we sweat in a sauna or a *banja*, as it is called in Russia. [DTA 1729, pag. 63; memoir by Dr. Hans K.]

<sup>542</sup> Alex Kayser, “Verwundete werden schneller gesund: Erfolgreicher Einsatz von KdF.-Sportlehrkräften bei der Verwundetenbetreuung,” *Arbeitertum*, Jul. 15, 1940, 9.

<sup>543</sup> See DTA; 1729 ; full name known to author.

Hans K.'s report shows front soldiers had quite an array of different leisure possibilities at their disposal. This is not to say that being a front soldier was like being on vacation! Rather: there were widespread attempts to alleviate hardships that soldiers encountered, and this was often through organized leisure activities. In addition to emphasizing the various types of recreational offerings, the testimony informs us that these offers came from "different sources." While the abovementioned front theater and also the library were probably arranged by KdF (the latter presumably through its Institute for the Education of the German People,) other activities described by Hans K. were originated either by the *Wehrmacht* (such as the radio station Radio Belgrade,) or, possibly, by the Propaganda Ministry (such as the movies)<sup>544</sup> or by the individual army unit and soldiers themselves (such as the sauna or the 'classical reading group.')

For Hans K., however, this did not matter. This warrants an important clarification in regards to this dissertation, which focuses solely on KdF's work. It is crucial to emphasize that my work only describes *one* part of Germans' everyday experience of leisure, be it in Germany or at the front as in Hans K.'s case. For each individual, the experienced "amount of leisure" or "received happiness" might have been potentially even larger than what I have described in this dissertation.

These recollections of Hans K., an ordinary German soldier also show us that leisure activities did not appear to have been perceived as especially "National Socialist." None of the events or activities described appears to have been particularly ideologically charged, or political at all. Conversely, Hans K. warmly reviews performances by

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<sup>544</sup> KdF, however, could have arranged that movie screening, too.

Russian and Ukrainian singers; thus, leisure, even if organized by KdF,<sup>545</sup> was not an expression of German patriotism, but might even help to augment a German soldier's sympathy for the cultural output of the enemy. In the same vein, one could read the German soldiers' enjoyment of a traditional Russian *banja* as a sign of their appreciation for Russian/Ukrainian everyday folk culture. Regarding German culture, Hans K. mentions the collective reading of great German writers. This, of course, KdF organizers would have liked, given the organization's goal of bringing Germany's *Bildung* and culture to every German (and its belief that exposure to the latter would increase the population's including workers' and soldiers' mental and eventual physical strength). However, Hans K.'s report on this aspect is somewhat restrained: not all of his fellow soldiers, but only those with a particular interest, joined in the readings, so generally, "the library was not used very much."

Above, I have analyzed KdF's troop entertainment for German soldiers, arguing that this activity was strongly dominated by KdF's commitment to "joy production." What KdF did then was in some respect contrary to what it set out to do – the organization gave up on "bringing high culture." In this regard, an analysis of KdF's troop entertainment supports further the overall thesis of my dissertation. For the history of KdF, it shows that the organization's work during the war did not fundamentally differ

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<sup>545</sup> In 1935, KdF-director Dreßler-Andreß decreed a ban of foreign artists performing for the leisure organization (Cf. "Anordnung 24/35," in: Deutsche Arbeitsfront, ed., *Amtliches Nachrichtenblatt der DAF* [Berlin: DAF, 1935], 239.) However, due to the increasing problems with getting German artists for the entertainment of the troops, this sector was eventually opened up to foreign artists, despite concerns about them being potential spies. (See Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 238.) Vossler interprets the incorporation of foreign artists as a sign of a failure on the part of KdF, especially as some reports describe that performances of foreign artists were preferred to those by German artists under the aegis of KdF. (See Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 304f. and 308.) German and foreign artists, if they were to perform in the same show, were not allowed participate in get-togethers after the show; Russian and German artists was generally not allowed to perform together for German soldiers within Germany. (See *Ibid.*, 308.)



from that of the pre-war years; if anything, one could argue that there was a certain escalation of its previous outlook. This overall diagnosis can also be applied to the second part of KdF's wartime work outside Germany, which I will discuss in the following: its activities for civilians in German-occupied Europe.

KdF's leisure programs for civilians in newly occupied territories was another major field that opened up through the war for KdF. The main target group for this were members of Ethnic German groups in these areas. KdF started to export its 'civilian' leisure work into German-occupied areas very shortly after the outbreak of World War II. It is important to note just how quickly the organization, here backed by the Nazi regime, acted to "export" its leisure offerings to the populations of occupied areas. The swiftness of these actions, I argue, is evidence for the importance of KdF and its "production of happiness for Germans" in the Third Reich.<sup>546</sup> However, in the field of leisure for Ethnic Germans in occupied Europe, this was joined by additional objectives: with its work for Ethnic Germans, as will also be discussed in the following, KdF tried to further "civilize" and "Germanize" this population, in order to integrate them into the Nazi-envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Overall, KdF's work in occupied areas was driven by the agenda of providing a

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<sup>546</sup> Especially for KdF organizers, it demonstrates their pride in their work – they were eager to bring their activities as quickly as possible to other places considered the export of leisure activities part of Germany's conquering of Europe. KdF's discourses about this suggest their strong belief in a German victory; one such example – which is especially informative, since *not* part of a Nazi publication, is that of Mr. Wolter, the head of the factory exhibition office, who was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. His employee Else Wendel recounts a conversation with him in late spring of 1940, when he asked her if she spoke English, which she confirmed: "Very well, then," he answered, "I will take you with me when we go to England. We intend to export the factory exhibitions to England, so one fine day we may find ourselves working in London!" (Else Wendel and Eileen Winnicroft, *Hausfrau at War: A German Woman's Account of Life in Hitler's Reich* (Edinburgh: Pentland Press, 1994), 82.) While said jestingly in this case, the thought of a German victory over England, with the subsequent export of KdF, was probably active in the minds of those working for KdF.

leisure infrastructure for Ethnic Germans living in the now occupied regions with all the activities that had been available to *Reich* Germans through the organization since 1933. This can be witnessed through KdF's involvement in Slovakia (beginning in April 1940,<sup>547</sup> and Belgium (beginning at the latest in summer 1940).<sup>548</sup> Other German-occupied areas saw the establishment of organizations that very much resembled KdF – even in their names – and that were in charge of arranging leisure activities and other KdF-like events. In Riga, Latvia, an organization called “*Erholung und Lebensfreude*” [“Relaxation and Joy of Life”] arranged leisure events, which were similar to those of KdF.<sup>549</sup> In the occupied Netherlands, “*Freude und Arbeit*” [“Joy and Work”] began its activities in November 1940.<sup>550,551</sup> Bringing organized leisure to these newly occupied

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<sup>547</sup> See BArch NS 22/90.

<sup>548</sup> See BArch NS 22/104.

<sup>549</sup> See BArch R 92/66 and BArch R 92/34.

<sup>550</sup> See BArch NS 22-103 “Eröffnung von ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” *Außendeutscher Wochenspiegel*, Nov. 5, 1940. Note that the article's title does indeed refer to KdF, while the article itself gives “Freude und Arbeit” as the name of the newly-founded organization. I could not find any commentary in the sources about why there were distinct “satellite” organizations in Holland and Latvia, while in other occupied regions, KdF itself simply organized these events. It is important to note that in the available sources, I found no distinct differences between KdF's offerings and those of “*Erholung und Lebensfreude*” and “*Arbeit und Freude*.”

<sup>551</sup> There was also German-organized leisure in occupied Norway. Activities in the realm of German theater in Norway appear to stem from a direct order by Hitler. In November 1940, he allegedly told Gau Leader Josef Terboven, the *Reichskommissar* of German occupied Norway, “Win me the Norwegians!” [“Gewinnt mir die Norweger!”]. This led to the foundation of a German Theater in the country's capital Oslo in April 1941. The theater was supported by a subvention of ca. 1.2 million *Reichsmark*, and mainly showed operettas, which followed the predominant emphasis on “joy” in entertainment during war times, and avoided difficult and ‘heavy’ material. Many of the performers came from KdF's *Theater des Volkes* in Berlin. According to Hennig Rischbieter, however, the endeavor “to win the Norwegians” could not be fully realized by this undertaking: “The Norwegians remained reserved [and] the audience was mainly made up of German occupation soldiers;” Thomas Eicher, Barbara Panse, and Henning Rischbieter, *Theater im “Dritten Reich”: Theaterpolitik, Spielplanstruktur, NS-Dramatik* (Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer, 2000), 85.

In Croatia, KdF established its “Beauty of Labor” program in 1944. Introducing this work was considered an important step towards “our task to realize, and show the entire world, the spirit of National Socialism, and avow ourselves to it through this deed.” (BArch NS 9/160, pag. 241; letter by DAF,

territories appears as an inherent part of German's occupation policy; put differently, KdF actively contributed to Germany's war effort and occupation by swiftly and broadly exporting its programs and activities.

Generally KdF maintained its overall outlook and principles when extending its programs to occupied regions. This is, for example, evident from a 1944 *Arbeitertum* article describing KdF's exported "Joy at the Danube."<sup>552</sup> The accompanying lists of KdF activities in the *Gau* Vienna had a strikingly high contingent of self-made "amateur art."<sup>553</sup> On the one hand, this points to KdF's attempts to organize as much leisure as possible at the lowest cost. On the other hand, of course, for KdF, this "amateurism" was in fact also the best leisure because it was considered more active and thus more 'strength producing' than passive consumption of events performed by professionals.<sup>554</sup>

Another of its main principles KdF carefully maintained when "exporting" its leisure activities abroad to Ethnic Germans was that of its leisure offerings' fundamentally voluntary character. KdF instructions to those organizing leisure in occupied territories, clarified that it had always "purposefully eliminated compulsion and formula" when it came to arranging leisure offerings; the participant should be able to opt for whatever he or she wished to do from a broad array of choices: "Whoever wants to do

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*Auslands-Organisation, NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude," Kreisverwaltung Kroatien.)*

<sup>552</sup> Generally, Robert Ley wanted to transform Vienna into a "KdF city," which meant that KdF would be in charge of the *Volksoper*, the municipal theater [*Stadttheater*] and the *Theater an der Wien*. Cultural life in Vienna, however, would never be fully under KdF's control, since Goebbels was very much involved in this realm. (See Rathkolb, *Führertreu und gottbegnadet*, 60.)

<sup>553</sup> According to the article; the *Gau* Vienna featured 200 active amateur groups. ("Freude an der Donau," *Arbeitertum*, April 15, 1944, 5.)

<sup>554</sup> In the case of Vienna *Gau*, KdF saw the amateur artistic endeavors of so many as proof of "the will to culture [*Kulturwillen*] of the Viennese workers." (Ibid.)

crafts, shall do crafts; whoever likes to sing shall have voice training, whoever wants to learn foreign languages shall speak or make conversation. And whoever is a passionate collector, shall collect.”<sup>555</sup>

An analysis of KdF’s work in German occupied Poland illustrates which practices in the field of entertainment and education KdF embarked on to integrate Ethnic Germans [*Volksdeutsche*] living in occupied territories into the overall German *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>556</sup> In East Upper Silesia, for example,<sup>557</sup> KdF operated an Institute of the Education of the German People, offering German language classes. These were very popular, with ca. 40,000 participants in 202 classes, forcing KdF to increase the number of courses it offered.<sup>558</sup> KdF activities also took place in other regions of Poland,<sup>559</sup> and

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<sup>555</sup> BArch NS 9/172; letter from May 29, 1941 by the *DAF Auslands-Organisation, Abt. KdF, Amt Feierabend*.

<sup>556</sup> Accordingly, KdF’s work in occupied areas was mainly conducted as “Volkstumsarbeit, “work for the [German] people.”

<sup>557</sup> I.e., in the region that the Treaty of Versailles forced the German *Reich* to give to Poland and that was then re-annexed in 1939 after Germany’s invasion of Poland.

<sup>558</sup> BArch NS 22/91; “KdF-Sprachkurse,” *Außendeutscher Wochenspiegel*, Mar. 3, 1940. The number of participants might be inflated; it is also not clear to which time-frame the numbers refer and in how many places/cities these courses took place. In the regional city of East Upper Silesia, Katowice, KdF opened a branch of the *Volksbildungswerk*, the “Volksbildungsstätte Kattowitz” in October of 1940 (See BArch NS 22/94; “Aufgaben des ansässigen Deutschtums,” *Außendeutscher Wochenspiegel*, Oct. 12, 1940.) It is conceivable, however, that the Institute offered classes prior to this. According to the article, these classes were for those inhabitants of East Upper Silesia who “had been forced to neglect their native mother tongue through the pressure of the Polish terror regime.” (BArch NS 22/91; “KdF-Sprachkurse,” *Außendeutscher Wochenspiegel*, Mar. 3, 1940.) Behind the propaganda, it would be interesting to know if all of the participants were indeed of German ethnicity or if there were some who used this opportunity to learn the language of the occupier, maybe even in an attempt to eventually pass themselves as ethnic Germans for opportunistic reasons. Attempts to pass as Ethnic German did occur; this article, however, does not comment on anything like that, and there are also no references to it in this source. (Cf. *Ibid.*)

<sup>559</sup> For example, the area designated as the *Gau Wartheland* had a KdF *Volksbildungswerk* which offered a total of 460 courses attended by 112,000 participants in 1940. In addition, during this year, KdF arranged ca. 1,190 events in this district, which were visited by over one million people.

Poland’s capital, Warsaw, also had a *Volksbildungsstätte*. Opened in 1941, its program included lectures in many fields, with a special emphasis on German history and “German cultural achievements in

included work by the Sports Department and the Leisure Department.<sup>560</sup> The latter wanted to bring “culture” for, just as it had with German workers, KdF operated on the assumption that Ethnic Germans had too long been deprived in this sphere. One preferred tool to realize this was puppetry. In newly annexed German territories, such as the *Gau Warthegau*, puppet theaters were to target ‘Ethnic Germans’ and support “the building of a German *Volk* culture.” In this manner, puppetry performances were to further the “Germanification process” [“*Eindeutschungsprozess*”] and bring “a piece of German homeland culture” to these formerly Polish regions.<sup>561</sup> In addition, KdF was involved in building an infrastructure of amusement and relaxation for the (Ethnic German) population in this *Gau*: KdF helped with the building<sup>562</sup> of a family pool in the town of Lobens in the Warthegau (KdF-*Familienbad* Lobens).<sup>563</sup> Behind these KdF activities for Ethnic Germans was the general aim to promote the notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, similarly to what I have shown for its activities for Germany’s (“Aryan”) population before the war. Education of Germans in Germany had always been part of KdF’s remit, and it certainly became a large part of KdF’s wartime activity, especially in terms of

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the East.” (BArch NS 22/95, “Warschau erhält deutsche Volksbildungsstätte, “*Außendeutscher Wochenspiegel*, Jan. 21, 1941.)

<sup>560</sup> For example, KdF organized Factory Sports in the *Gau Wartheland*; in 1941, a “Sports Day for Factories” [“*Sporttag der Betriebe*”] drew more than 10,000 workers as participants. (BArch NS 22/94; “Rechenschaftsbericht der DAF,” *Litzmanstädter Zeitung*, Jan. 31, 1941.)

<sup>561</sup> Anacker, quoted in Bach, “Puppenbühnen an der deutschen Front,” 76.

<sup>562</sup> A close reading of the article reveals that KdF was, as usual, only the source of the *idea* for the erection of the facility, which appears to have really been built/financed by the town itself.

<sup>563</sup> “KdF-Familienbad Lobens,” *Arbeitertum*, Sep. 1, 1940, rear side. Overall, for the year 1941-42, KdF reported organizing a total of 1,345 public events with 500,000 (Ethnic) German visitors in the *Gau Wartheland*; see Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 159. In both urban and rural regions of annexed Poland, KdF events were always visited by large numbers and were “very popular, [especially] for the rural population.” [SD-report from Apr. 15, 1940; in: *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 122 (Vol. 6.).]

provision of language and history classes to Ethnic Germans.

KdF seemed to construe the task of teaching Ethnic Germans about Germany however less in terms of propagandistically promoting German language and culture and more in terms of promoting language and culture *for* Germans. That is, KdF sought to enhance the lives of Germans as much as it sought to make those lives more “properly German.” This is clearly seen in KdF’s claims that it rejected compulsion and formula and the fact that it offered not only German language classes but also foreign language classes, as well as classes in crafts, music, and collecting. Of course, the image KdF presents of itself cannot be fully trusted. However, criticisms, both from other Nazi organizations and from Ethnic Germans, that KdF was not ‘proper’ enough are very suggestive in this context. These criticisms show KdF did not meet the expectations of ideologues which, as this was possibly because of the organization’s unstructured and open approach, adds plausibility to the organization’s own claim to have adopted such an educational approach.

An example of the above cited criticisms about KdF’s work for Ethnic Germans is the feedback in 1940 from a group in a camp for resettled ‘Volhynia Germans.’ This audience did not like the KdF-organized performances, since they lacked “the necessary tone” when portraying women and girls.<sup>564</sup> Another report, this time from Slovakia (for the year 1942) speaks to KdF’s apparent failure when attempting to foster the German “racial community.” The activities organized to entertain and educate Ethnic Germans in Slovakia “had a rather problematic program outline” in the context of politics of ethnicity. A dance performance, for example, not only evinced “artistic inferiority,” but

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<sup>564</sup> SD-report from Mar. 8, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 586.

also included “the Hungarian Dances by Brahms, which were danced in Hungarian costumes and with the Hungarian national colors. The Magyars in the audience applauded and cheered ostentatiously.”<sup>565</sup> Clearly, this cultural event did not foster the correct (German) patriotic feelings, and did nothing to help integrate Ethnic Germans into the larger German *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>566</sup>

KdF’s work for Ethnic Germans in newly occupied regions further intensified another element of its work already been inherent in the German context – in its Beauty of Labor programs and, maybe even more starkly, in KdF’s peacetime work in the countryside. This is the role of leisure activities as civilizing effort. We here again see how KdF’s work in occupied Europe very much built on KdF’s pre-war work. Through leisure events, KdF hoped for formative effects on Ethnic German populations in the newly occupied regions; such ‘civilizing’ was deemed necessary for the desired integration of these people into the larger *Volksgemeinschaft* (and for its further strengthening.) The following case, of KdF’s work done in Alsace, formerly France, makes this facet even more visible. Here, German publications celebrated KdF’s activities as a civilizing process, emphasizing how much KdF had to “start from scratch” when it came building an infrastructure of social policy and leisure offerings in Alsace. None of this, in the German view, had been available under the French rule of this region. When KdF started its activities here in the summer of 1940, it was faced “with a totally chaotic situation,” at least according to a 1942 article in a DAF brochure:

The “heritage” left behind by the French was simply bleak. Conditions in the

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<sup>565</sup> SD-report from Mar. 9, 1942, in *Ibid.*, 3344.

<sup>566</sup> In terms of KdF’s policies about events like these, it is worth noticing that not only was Hungarian music (albeit à la Brahms) performed at the concert, but Magyars were also allowed attend.

countryside were the worst in this respect, [as] there was a lack of stages as well as halfway appropriate venues for events and sufficient accommodation facilities. No wonder, since under French rule the government had never taken any initiative to satisfy the cultural needs of the rural population. Nor had anyone else had taken care of this. [BArch NS 45/99, pag. 81967f; “KdF.-Arbeit im Elsass: Die Schaffenden des Kreises Hagenau lernen auch hier den Unterschied zwischen einst und jetzt kennen,” *Der Gaubrief*, Mar. 20, 1943, 19.]

In its own propaganda, it was thus only through KdF’s efforts (made possible through the German occupation) that improvement of the everyday life of the Alsatian population in the sphere of leisure occurred, this realm having been utterly neglected by the French. KdF now realized “some beautiful hours by means of various events of serious or cheerful manner.” Especially in the countryside, the task was to ensure “German cultural goods [were] communicated” through various concerts and theater and vaudeville evenings, most especially for the workers in the factories located in these rural areas. In the district city of Hagenau, too, workers’ visits by lecturers and theater performers were facilitated. KdF’s involvement in Alsace (and so, indirectly, the German occupation of this region) was thus justified as improving the situation of the region’s population. Of course, the primary logic behind the urge to achieve such advancement of the population was based in the fact that there were many Ethnic Germans living in Alsace and that the region was considered as predominantly German by the Nazi regime.<sup>567</sup> KdF’s work was thus also considered aid for “Alsatian People’s Comrades [*Volksgenossen*]” as they returned to “German cultural life” and “the ideas of the German people.”<sup>568</sup> KdF’s activities in newly occupied places such as Alsace aimed at “rescuing” the Ethnic

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<sup>567</sup> In 1940, after Germany’s occupation of the Alsace region, the Nazi government included it in the new German administrative district ‘Baden’. Alsace had been annexed by Germany after the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, but fell back under French government as part of the Versailles Treaty.

<sup>568</sup> BArch NS 45/99, pag. 81967 f.; “KdF.-Arbeit im Elsass: Die Schaffenden des Kreises Hagenau lernen auch hier den Unterschied zwischen einst und jetzt kennen,” *Der Gaubrief*, Mar. 20, 1943, 19. For KdF’s work in Strasbourg, Alsace, also see the booklet *Unser Programm* (Strasbourg, 1940).



Germans living there and wanted to facilitate the necessary civilizing and cultural work to achieve this.

For KdF, the reason why cultural rescue or intervention was necessary was clear; the former (national) governance – in this case France – for the now occupied region was to blame. A 1940 *Arbeitertum* spelled this out, pointing at “the difference in attitude between us [the Germans] and our enemies towards cultural necessities in war.” This specific article looks at Metz in the (formerly French) region of Lorraine, but its logic can be generalized in terms of KdF’s overall thinking. It compares French and German front theater; more precisely, it describes how KdF reopened the theater in Metz, France<sup>569</sup> only a few days after the Germans had occupied the town.<sup>570</sup> In times of war, the article claims, the French chose to let their theaters “lie idle,” instead of using them for the “mental care-taking” of their soldiers. Conversely, Nazi Germany valued culture much more, according to the article; taking great pains to uphold theaters, and even increasing the number of theatrical performances during the war, arranging additional ones for soldiers.<sup>571</sup> “We have with great effort and through the sacrifice and commitment of our performers shortened the long waiting time for our soldiers by employing traveling stages

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<sup>569</sup> Metz, capital of the Lorraine region, had been a German city from 1871 until 1918. For the overall situation in Lothringen, see Dieter Wolfanger, *Die Nationalsozialistische Politik in Lothringen (1940-1945)* (Saarbrücken: s.n., 1977).

<sup>570</sup> This theater’s opening “ended a period of over twenty years in which no German words were spoken on this stage;” however, it was difficult to reopen the theater because it had in fact been closed for some time – that is, it had been closed down by the French significantly before the war began. (The article does not specify the actual closing date.) This is presented as evidence for French “headlessness:” shutting a theater made no sense in peace-time. (See “KdF in Front: Im Stadttheater Metz spielen deutsche Künstler,” *Arbeitertum*, Aug. 1, 1940, 12.)

<sup>571</sup> Of course, so did the French; they, too, had a program of troop entertainment, which included theater performances for soldiers. The author of this article chose to omit this information.

and theater ensembles' guests performances."<sup>572</sup> The comparison of France and Germany does not stop here; the article goes on to argue that theater performances for French soldiers would have not made much difference anyway. "But what worth was mental care-taking [*geistige Betreuung*] on the opponent's part anyway, as performances of true art for Niggers would have only had very dubious value."<sup>573</sup> The claim is that theater was properly valued and understood only by German soldiers (and by Nazi Germany,) and that it cannot by the French population, especially because it is partially composed of black people. The article thus argues –somewhat incoherently, confusing several levels of discourse – that the French government fails to grasp the importance of theater, and that the French people cannot appreciate theater. Consequently, bringing theater and other cultural events to soldiers and workers is portrayed as proof for German racial superiority.

So, overall, the article on the Metz theater highlights KdF's belief in German racial and cultural superiority, and the interrelation of both. Furthermore, it portrays the French as headlessly stupid with regard to culture during (and before) the war. Only Nazi Germany, represented by KdF, demonstrates appropriate concern for culture and a population's (cultural) needs in war, or so the claim. The Metz case symbolizes the connection between leisure and the implementation of a superior German culture.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> To prove Germany superiority, the author furthermore states that in Germany, "even theaters that were located close to the fighting lines have not been closed because of KdF's commitment; rather, through their plays, [front theaters] have procured joy and relaxation for our soldiers and workers at the front." ("KdF in Front: Im Stadttheater Metz spielen deutsche Künstler," *Arbeitertum*, Aug. 1, 1940, 12.)

<sup>573</sup> "KdF in Front: Im Stadttheater Metz spielen deutsche Künstler," *Arbeitertum*, Aug. 1, 1940, 12.

<sup>574</sup> In other occupied countries we also see KdF working to educate foreigners about the superiority of German culture. In Denmark, this notion conditions five classical concerts by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, which took place between July 19 and 26 in several Danish cities and were fully sold out. A KdF report says they were "an extraordinary success," especially as "it can be assumed that these concerts were

However, it is important that this is mainly a claim made by KdF and its propaganda. A more intriguing, and more telling, scenario arises when the locale shifts from Metz to Paris. Paris might have been a place of inferior non-Germanness, but it was also an enviable world cultural capital. The German occupation of Paris was crucial in many strategic and symbolic ways, but in the context of KdF and other cultural organizations, Paris's might as a city of culture is of primary significance.<sup>575</sup>

So far, my analysis of KdF's work for civilians in occupied Europe has mainly been occurred on the level of examinations of KdF's goals – it is time to also consider what KdF in fact did and what effects this had. KdF's work in occupied Paris provides a good case for this. The larger context for this is Nazi attempt to culturally “Germanize” occupied Paris. KdF's overall role in this was limited, as its primary task in the French capital was the entertainment of the German army, and not the Parisian population. Nevertheless, KdF's activities in Paris were related to this overall endeavor. A salient point I will make with regard to KdF and its participation in this cultural “Germanization” is that its activities in Paris were still all about fun and joy, even to the overshadowing of ‘civilizing’ or ‘Germanizing’ aims. KdF undertakings tended to

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immensely valuable in regards to propaganda and it is thus desirable, that such outstanding art is made accessible more frequently to the Danish civilian population.” (BArch RW 38/61 [Freiburg].) Impressing the Danes with “outstanding” German culture was considered a useful to the occupiers because it might convince them of German greatness and superiority. The idea that KdF was used to showcase German superiority is also inherent in an (unproven) allegation by the Polish government-in-exile (which Richard Evans discusses) “that the Nazi leisure organization ‘Strength through Joy’ organized tourist visits to the [Warsaw] ghetto, where the conditions the Germans themselves had created confirmed visitors in their sense of superiority over the ragged, starving and disease-ridden Jews they encountered.” (Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 65.) Such trips were not typical of KdF's repertoire, and not easily reconciled with its joy-production-ambition, but using its activities to demonstrate ‘superiority’ was not alien to KdF – especially if this could be done through culture and entertainment.

<sup>575</sup> KdF began its activities in Paris shortly after the German army entered the city in June 1940. The *Fronttheater Pless* performed only one month after the occupation in Paris. (See Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 149.)

transform the loci of French high culture into places of straightforward German amusement. This may be read as an ultimate failure of KdF's project to "bring culture;" in this, the Paris case stands *pars pro toto* for all of KdF's work during the war and so supports my overall thesis of KdF's prioritizing "joy production" over "culture production."

Conversely to my claim, the American newspaper *Christian Science Monitor* attested that Paris was "Germanized," and swiftly, by late summer 1940. The article states that the "Champs Elysees, [the] nearest Paris equivalent to New York's Fifth Avenue, looks more like Berlin today than the capital of France."<sup>576</sup> "Soldatenkinos" and "soldatenheims" [cinemas and homes for soldiers] had popped up in the middle of Paris along with KdF theaters "where German language plays are produced by traveling companies of the Nazi strength through joy organization." Significantly, the article's titular claim, "Paris Germanized," is primarily explained on the cultural level; in addition to cinema and theaters, it also mentions concerts by German bands for German soldiers "held several times a week in Paris parks and squares and occasionally troops march through the streets singing."<sup>577</sup> Overall, 120,000 people were employed to put on plays, vaudeville and cabaret shows, opera performances, or to give lectures.<sup>578</sup> However, the

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<sup>576</sup> The article also describes the "Champs Elysees [as] a popular place [for] German officers to stroll and the café terraces bordering the avenue invite many of them. Here is one of the few cafes in Paris with a sign in its windows reading: 'For Aryans only'." ("Paris 'Germanized'," *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 1, 1940.)

<sup>577</sup> "Paris 'Germanized'," *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 1, 1940.

<sup>578</sup> These numbers come from the German Labor Front [Quoted after Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 212 f.] For a discussion of Parisian cultural life under Nazi occupation beyond KdF offerings, see Alan Riding, *And the Show Went on: Cultural Life in Nazi-occupied Paris* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). For Nazi German cultural politics for Paris, see Kathrin Engel, *Deutsche Kulturpolitik im Besetzten Paris 1940-1944: Film und Theater* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2003).

article's argument for "Germanization" relates to the fact that there was now a lot of culture organized by Germans and for Germans in Paris. This would only have been the first stage of what the Nazis and KdF had in mind when they referred to a process of "Germanization."

German cultural politics in Paris overall were motivated by the eventual goal of German domination in the sphere of culture in the French capital.<sup>579</sup> As noted, KdF was quasi *ex officio*<sup>580</sup> not a key player in this; nevertheless, we can discern this goal at times lurking behind KdF activities and their advertisement. A 1941 KdF event serves as good example of this: on behalf of the *Wehrmacht*, KdF staged a performance of Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre* in the Paris Opera House, by the Mannheim National Theater. This was surely a symbolically charged importation, if not imposition, of an opera by Hitler's favorite composer, based on heroic German mythology, into the heart of Parisian cultural life.<sup>581</sup>

It would be misleading, however, to consider this "high art" KdF event as typical of what the leisure organization did in Paris. In fact, here, too, KdF remained loyal to its

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<sup>579</sup> For a description of these German cultural occupation politics, see Engel, *Deutsche Kulturpolitik im Besetzten Paris 1940-1944*.

<sup>580</sup> Here I refer to the aforementioned fact that KdF's work in Paris was officially limited to the entertainment of troops. In this area, however, KdF was rather active, and "had taken good care of itself," as Geerte Murmann writes, its new Parisian office having the very prominent address of 101 Champs Elysees; a report in the DAF-magazine *Angriff* claimed that "the curious French would peek into [its] windows;" adding that "the interest was understandable. A new world was opening up" (Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 212 f.)

<sup>581</sup> In addition, the KdF brochure advertising the event pointed out that the Parisian opera had undergone a technological makeover in 1936-37. This renovation (a new electrical apparatus for controlling the lights and colors on stage ) had been partly carried out by "famous German companies," according to the brochure. This points out another, rather different, way of "Germanifying" this French cultural site. (*Die Deutsche Arbeitsfront NS-Gemeinschaft "Kraft durch Freude" veranstaltet im Auftrage des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht "Walküre" von Richard Wagner: Gastspiel des Mannheimer National Theaters in der Pariser Oper*. (Paris, 1941), 1-5.)

commitment to providing amusement and entertainment to German soldiers, focusing on vaudeville acts rather than demanding musical performances. A look at KdF's *Deutsches Soldaten-Theater* [German Theater for Soldiers] in Paris, which opened during the summer of 1940, confirms this.

The theater was deemed a place for the “best German vaudeville art” in an *Arbeitertum* article from the same year. What this entails exactly can be inferred from the pictures that accompany the article; here, we see several performers doing acrobatics. The theater’s emphasis was apparently on light entertainment: a ticket for a performance, partially reproduced in the article, announces “Cheerful Vaudeville” [*Heiteres Variete*,”] including “ballet, music, acrobatics” (and possibly comedy).<sup>582</sup> The photograph of the “German Theater for Soldiers” also indicates that the theater performances happened daily and were for free.<sup>583</sup>

**“KdF in Paris”** Fig. 5.5 *Arbeitertum*’s coverage on KdF’s “German Theater for Soldiers,” opened in 1940. A translation of the German text is provided above. (“KdF in Paris,” *Arbeitertum*, Sep. 5, 1940, rear page.)



Regarding its activities in Paris, then, KdF was asked to “counter” esteemed French culture with its German equivalent, they chose to present the “best German vaudeville art.” It is hard, however, to see what was especially “German” about this vaudeville. While KdF’s

<sup>582</sup> Only the first letter “H” is legible on the article; see KdF in Paris,” *Arbeitertum*, Sep. 15, 1940, rear page.

<sup>583</sup> This, however, probably referred only to members of the German army.

conception of “German art” was continually shifting and was never conclusively defined, it most clearly referred to works of art of traditional cultural heritage or from the classical German canon. “Cheerful vaudeville” did not really fall under this definition, nor is it easy to see how it would lead to the “Germanizing” effects the organization hoped for. There was a clear discrepancy between KdF’s agenda and what it did in practice. The organization was in fact aware of this discrepancy, and feebly tried to cover it up using empty labels such as “*German* vaudeville,” but never really addressed it. This is because the goal of “Germanizing” collided with that of KdF’s “joy production” – the “German Theater for Soldiers in Paris” should be seen as one such collision site, and consequently one where the “Germanizing” goal collapsed in the impact. This “Germanizing” effort was the ‘international cousin’ of KdF’s pre-war effort to familiarize German workers with German high culture, which likewise tended to lose out to other concerns. Familiarizing Germans with German high culture, and the “Germanizing” effort to introduce (Ethnic German) populations abroad to ‘high brow’ German culture both eventually failed for KdF – because KdF stuck much more to its “joy production.” My analysis thus identifies parallels between the two situations – in Germany and abroad – in terms of both what KdF wanted and what they did (or did not do). And in both cases, there were clear discrepancies between KdF’s goals and its actions.

Until now, I have considered KdF’s work in occupied regions only mainly from KdF’s own perspective. It is important to look now at the ‘other side’ of things, *viz.* the effects and reception of KdF outside Germany, insofar as the sources allow – thereby assessing (to a somewhat rudimentary degree) the third overall level of my analysis. In this regard, it can be said that KdF’s work was perceived as part of the Nazi apparatus

and its occupational policies, especially by the non-German populations of occupied areas. This is surely to be expected, but it does not necessarily gainsay my overall claim about KdF as a joy-production institution that opened spaces for unexpected reactions to Nazi rule. Indeed, some KdF events in occupied territories even became outlets for downright anti-German activities. In Steyr, a city in annexed Austria, Polish workers, most likely forced laborers, disturbed a KdF organized event in 1940, and subsequently went on strike.<sup>584</sup> Similar occurrences took place in other regions. Protesting or disturbing KdF events was for some an apt form of resistance against Nazi occupation. The easy accessibility of these events might be one reason for such developments but they must also indicate the degree to which leisure events organized by KdF were perceived to be part of the “Nazi system,” at least by the resisters (who would, given their “non-Germanness,” typically have been barred from participating in these events.) Organized leisure, targeting mainly the ethnic German population, was primarily seen as an occupational measure, rather than as consisting of purely recreational, apolitical activities. On the other hand, because KdF events were also viable sites of protest, another thing worth noting about these protests is that they could count as evidence for the openness of KdF events. Resistance and protest would have been easier against “softer targets,” suggesting KdF was just such a softer target. And this in turn may speak to KdF's events as representing one of the more relaxed aspects of Germany's occupation, an impression that might have well been connected to KdF's overall characteristic of “joy production.”

KdF was, of course, not an entirely benign organization, concerned only with

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<sup>584</sup> SD-report from spring 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 822. The report does not detail what happened to these Poles.



bringing joy to anyone whomsoever. Its emphasis was always German joy for Germans, and the production of German strength through German joy. Non-Germans in German-occupied territory were never going to see a German organization as anything but a part of the German occupation. That would go without saying, but it is the reason why protests would strike against KdF. That is, what we see here is that KdF was perceived as a Nazi organization by the occupied populations because KdF was a Nazi organization<sup>585</sup> – which does not prove KdF was not also and foremost about “joy production;” in other words, cases of protest against KdF do not really touch my main thesis.

An analysis of KdF’s work for Ethnic Germans is useful on several levels for our larger understanding of the work and goals of KdF. First, I argue that KdF’s swift export of its leisure activities – and that it was allowed to do so! – speaks to the importance that was attributed both to “joy production,” especially in war, and to KdF and its providing this. I have shown, that, to an extent, KdF’s work in occupied Europe mirrored what the organization had been doing in Germany in the pre-war years. We can see how KdF reacted to the war by building on previous, peace-time experiences. However, its work for Ethnic Germans also leads to a strengthening of its inherent goal of “civilizing” and “Germanizing,” in an attempt to integrate the Ethnic German populations in occupied Europe as quickly and smoothly as possible into the Nazi envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*. In this regard, both these interconnected agendas were not fully realized or even attempted, since they ultimately lost out against the stronger “joy production” urge on KdF’s part.

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<sup>585</sup> In fact, it is granting KdF’s background as a Nazi organization that my argument suggests the organization was not entirely determined by that background, or rather: this background did nevertheless allow KdF to be concerned with “joy production” for Germans.

KdF's underlying goal of realizing and strengthening a *Volksgemeinschaft* in occupied Europe had a political and (Nazi) ideological dimension. However, it is also important to consider how much actual direct political dissemination was attempted through KdF's leisure events. As discussed above, the material is not sufficient to allow such analysis on the level of its programs. Another way to get to this question is to look at the practices and experience of those active for KdF on the ground: the artists. The remainder of the chapter will address the experience and reception of artists working for KdF in the arena of troop entertainment. First, I will turn to accounts from two women who were active as performers at the front. Although these cases will bring out more detail about the role of women in KdF, my main discussion of these sources will be more general. Marget Sailer's letter suggests that, despite the criticisms just discussed, KdF was sometimes successful in producing joy at the front. Paula von Reznicek's diary entries further support this point and, in addition, her writings highlight again the reach of KdF, its ingenuity in reaching remote places. Most importantly, her account about her involvement in troop entertainment that consisted of talking to soldiers about motor cars and sports highlights that KdF's entertainers' roles were clearly to entertain and energize soldiers, perhaps even to educate them, but on politically neutral topics.

Amateur artiste Marga Sailer was a member of a vaudeville troupe with the telling name "*Die Freudenspender*" ["The Joy Dispensers."] In 1943, she performed with her ensemble for German soldiers in the East. A letter by Marga, published in DAF's magazine *Feldpostbrief* [Mail to the Front,] speaks to the effects which KdF troop entertainment might have had on the army.<sup>586</sup> Addressing her letter to "My Dear Front

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<sup>586</sup> It is important to be aware this was not a private letter, but one published in a magazine of the German Labor Front; thus it was used for DAF/KdF propaganda (and so possibly doctored to fit this purpose.)

Soldier,” she writes,

You followed our performances with such silence, discipline and interior participation! Your faces, which are usually so strict, turned soft; I saw in your eyes sparkling and lighting up when we emptied out the muses’ cornucopias, when we quickly alternated singing, dancing, playing music, telling serious and cheerful tales. And even if the Bolsheviks aimlessly discharged weapons in the darkest night, when the flak shot so heavily that the window panes rattled and the ground shook: from you, such a calmness and happiness emanated, which carried over to us. [Quoted after Geerte Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg: Deutsches und Alliiertes Fronttheater* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992), 143.]

If this letter is authentic, it is clear why the German Labor Front chose to publish it: Marga Sailer confirms what KdF hoped for: that entertaining soldiers would not only distract them from their worries, but that also lead to a “building up” of a certain strength; in Marga’s letter, this strength is described as a combination of calmness and happiness.

The extensive (unpublished) diaries of another woman, Paula Struck von Reznicek, allow us some insight into the everyday practice of wartime troop entertainment for German soldiers and its reception, presumably free of potential Nazi propaganda embellishments. The wife of famous race driver Hans Stuck,<sup>587</sup> Paula von Reznicek accompanied her husband on KdF troop entertainment trips.<sup>588</sup> Stuck toured

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<sup>587</sup> Paul von Reznicek was herself a former professional tennis player and later an author and journalist; she married Hans Stuck in 1932.

<sup>588</sup> Officially, Paula von Reznicek was Hans Stuck’s assistant – KdF employed her as a projectionist (and later as a backup driver and correspondent; see BArch MSG 2, 19539 [Freiburg]; Stuck, Paula Stuck, *Wehrbetreuung während des 2. Weltkrieges: Reise und Erlebnisberichte mit Illustrationen 1940-1945*, Vol. 11). In reality, however, she was the tour’s manager; see Franz Bokel, “Das Unternehmen Stuck: stars and public relations in Hitler’s Deutschland,” *Montage/AV* 6.2 (1997): 103. Bokel argues in his article that Reznicek-Stuck had been the driving force and manager behind the “enterprise Stuck” ever since their marriage, and now simply continued in this role. Her somewhat prominent participation in KdF troop entertainment is even more curious given that Paula Stuck von Reznicek was of Jewish ancestry and officially “Non-Aryan.” This was known; because of his marriage to a Non-Aryan, Hans Stuck was denied full-membership in the National Socialist Motor Corps [NSKK], and he was publicly attacked for his marriage in a 1934 article in the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*. (See *Ibid.*, 98 and 100.) Stuck’s personal relationship with Hitler and Goering, however, saved his wife. (See *Ibid.*, 98.) Most likely, this was also the reason that both were cleared to work for KdF. On Hans Stuck’s life, and in particular his situation during 1933 to 1945, see also his memoirs, Hans Stuck, *Tagebuch eines Rennfahrers*. (Munich: Moderne Verlags GmbH, 1967); and Eberhard Reuss, *Hitlers Rennschlachten die Silberpfeile unterm Hakenkreuz* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verl., 2006).

several occupied European countries, including Norway, Denmark, Sweden and France, as well as Britain's Channel Islands and gave talks on his race driving career.<sup>589</sup> Overall, a very successful picture of KdF's troop entertainment emerges from her diaries. Generally, Stuck's lectures were very well received – and this despite the fact that lectures usually ranked as the least favorite form of all troop entertainment.<sup>590</sup> Again and again, Reznicek-Stuck's diary expresses how grateful the audiences – German soldiers stationed in Norway, France or Denmark – were and how much they enjoyed Stuck's presentations.<sup>591</sup> The soldiers' gratitude seems to have been especially large because the Stucks tended to visit smaller, more remote places. They could do this since they were flexible enough to reach them: they traveled on their own and not as part of a larger ensemble. A thank-you letter from a KdF functionary in Norway emphasizes this special gratitude of soldiers in remote stations:

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<sup>589</sup> Stuck's lectures for KdF "followed a simple formula:" he mostly related stories and anecdotes from life as a race driver, shared some technical details about race cars and showed several film clips, before opening the floor to questions. (Bokel, "Das Unternehmen Stuck," 105.; see also BArch MSG 2/15648 [Freiburg]; Paula Stuck, *Wehrbetreuung während des 2. Weltkrieges*, Volume 10: Plaudereien mit einem Rennfahrer: "Hans Stuck-Abende auf der Insel Jersey.")

<sup>590</sup> In her diaries, Stuck von Reznicek comments several times on the unpopularity of lectures and how the audiences were often at first quite hesitant and reserved about her husband's performance, but then were quickly "won over." For example, in July 1942, after performing in a military hospital near Rouen, France, she writes: "The KdF representative Graf and his secretary came to listen [...] [Afterwards] Graf openly vocalized his admiration. He said candidly to Hans: 'Golly, that seems more like a theater play - though it is labeled as a lecture.' Curious, everybody shivers because of: lectures!" (BArch MSG 2/15653, pag.198 [Freiburg], Paula Stuck, *Wehrbetreuung während des 2. Weltkrieges*, Volume 15; see also BArch Msg 2/15640, pag 66 [Freiburg], Ibid., Volume. 2 and BArch Msg 2/ 15651, pag. 90 [Freiburg], Ibid., Volume 12.)

<sup>591</sup> An entry from March 1941, when the Stucks are in Norway, serves as a good example: "In Torpo, in a military camp [*Truppenlager*] well disguised in a forest, we are welcomed by the regiment's commander, Oberst Beren and Battalion commander Major Krueder. Both thank us after [Stuck's] lecture with emphatic words in a speech that says verbatim: 'A pleasure far beyond those of any other KdF performances – which cannot be surpassed.' (We now hear that for the 5th time.) And the people don't have to say that! It comes out honestly and candidly." (BArch MSG 2/15644 [Freiburg], Ibid., Vol. 6.) Of course, such praise for Stuck's performance could also be read as a simultaneous critique of other KdF events that Stuck's audience had previously attended.

you and your wife have brought joy and relaxation to our soldiers here in the most northern part of Norway during the long Polar Night, through your lectures [which you gave] under most the difficult weather and traffic conditions. A special thank you for choosing to take care of those small army units stationed in the most lonely manner.” [BArch MSG 2, 15644, vol. 6, pag. 356 (Freiburg); letter from Mar. 26, 1944 to Hans Stuck by Heinz Manthey, KdF representative in Norway.]

The ‘small scale’ of the venues visited by Stuck is also referred to in a 1942 article on his doings in the west of France, at the French Channel Coast: “In the West – somewhere in the hinterland of the channel coast, there is a small French place. It’s less than a town, and wants to be a bit more than a village. That is why among the sparse lines of houses, there is a cute tiny theater. One can count the few lines of seats.” Furthermore, KdF’s commitment to bring leisure events to even the most remote places, is also referenced in this article: “Day by day, Hans Stuck goes to the villages [*auf die Dörfer*]. Often, [he performs for] only the small group of a [military] message routing unit, sometimes he visits a veterinary company’s quarters; but wherever his car brings him, he speaks for Germany. Because he knows that today only the biggest name is big enough to lighten the small soldier’s daily routine with hours of joy.”<sup>592</sup> This commitment was driven by the understanding of the importance of keeping up morale amongst soldiers in these “forgotten” places.

Overall, both Paula Stuck von Reznicek’s diary and the newspaper clippings it contains present a generally positive image of KdF troop entertainment and its reception.<sup>593</sup> According to her account, German soldiers were generally very pleased with

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<sup>592</sup> BArch MSG 2/ 15654 pag. 262, [Freiburg], Ibid., Volume 6.; Dr. J. Friedrich, “Hans Stuck als ‘fahrender’ Künstler: Der bekannte Rennfahrer war an der Kanalküste.”

<sup>593</sup> Paula Stuck’s diaries inform us about the infrastructure KdF set up for its touring artists, at least in the ways it was perceived by the “traveling artist couple” Stuck. Not surprisingly, matters very much differed depending on the troop entertainers’ specific location. Paula Stuck remarks that in France and Belgium, KdF had “its own offices, hotels and meals” – in contrast to, for example, Norway and Poland. In Paris,

KdF's activities, or at least with the kind offered by Hans Stuck. Any kind of Nazi ideology or lengthy political content seems to have been generally absent from his performances.

Paula Stuck's diary allows us a small insight into the experience of front entertainers as well as how they were received. She was traveling with her husband and this might be the reason that none of her entries touch on a theme that emerges in other sources that deal with front artists: the role of women at the front. Of course, due to the war context, the presence of female entertainers in KdF's activities at the front was not a small one; tellingly, this appears in the sources as part of the contested and criticized aspects of KdF's troop entertainment. In the following I discuss several such (critical) reactions to KdF's use of female entertainers and to the women themselves. This discussion will uncover assumptions about what a 'German woman' should be in the eyes of German soldiers and those involved, including KdF. In this context, we will encounter yet another instance of discrepancy between KdF's 'published image' and its actual practice. Once again, the reason for this discrepancy might lie in KdF's commitment to joy-production: KdF's interests are focused on either entertaining or comforting soldiers – making their lives more joyful – and the organization was far more likely to produce a bawdy chorus line of scantily clad dancers than to mount high culture events. This may

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KdF artists are put up in the former Hotel Carlton, which the leisure organization had sequestered. (See BArch MSG 2/ 15654, pag. 4 [Freiburg], Paula Stuck, *Wehrbetreuung während des 2. Weltkrieges*, Volume 4 and 10.) When performing in Bordeaux, the Stucks are accommodated in a *Künstlerheim* [artists home] of the German Labor Front – the building was a student dormitory before the war. (BArch MSG 2/15649, pag. 10 [Freiburg] , *ibid.*, Volume 11.) At other times of their tour, the Stucks either slept in a caravan they brought along, or they stayed in regular hotels. The latter, Paula's diary suggests, were not always very pleased about hosting artists. When staying on the German occupied Channel Islands in September 1941, Paula Stuck writes: "In the hotel, it looks gaudy on the terraces. The KdF troupe *Bilderbuch* [Picture Book] is ready to depart. It consists of eight lively and partly quite pretty young girls and about six men. [...]It was noticeable that the butler and maids [...] sighed with relief that the 'artists' were taking off." (BArch MSG 2/15648, pag. 178 [Freiburg], *Ibid.*, Volume 10.)

equate to a fairly tacky type of joy, but does highlight KdF's consistent concern with fun.

Soldiers, but even more their commanders, were concerned about the behavior and attire of female artists employed by the leisure organization. The author of the before discussed report for the 392<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from 1941, for example, was quite upset about the degree of female nudity contained in KdF performances. He was worried about what effects this might have on ‘his’ soldiers: “The many nude performances in the vaudeville shows are also not in accordance with our striving to bring soldiers to restrain themselves toward French women.”<sup>594</sup> He was concerned that excessively-sexualized KdF performances would lead to “unrestrained” behavior by German soldiers stationed in France. He saw a risk that the soldiers would act on their urges, which KdF had provoked, or at least augmented, and “fraternize” with French women, either in consensual or non-consensual form. That the soldiers might sexually transgress against women was not the only worry here – Germans’ sexual contact with French women was, of course, undesirable on the basis of Nazi racial thinking. This same concern, that (KdF’s) entertainment for soldiers potentially endangered the German “Aryan” race, was also shared by Hitler and Goebbels, as we learn from a 1940 diary entry by the latter:

The *Führer* does not think it is a good idea to send ballets to the front. It is out of the question for soldiers who have not seen women for such a long time. This especially applies to Narvik [in Norway]. But also to France. It cannot be in our interest, that our soldiers there get sick by French women or that they help them with first-class children, which then help to improve the race there [in France]. [Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher*. Part I, vol. 8, 239.; entry from Jul. 26, 1940.]

Other issues of gender, somewhat different but also related to ideas of racial superiority, appear in other instances of criticism regarding KdF’s front entertainment. This type of worry was less about the deleterious effects on German soldiers, but rather focused on the

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<sup>594</sup> BArch RH 26/169/93 [Freiburg]; *Stimmungsbericht* by 392<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, Jan. 25, 1941.

populations of occupied countries and their encounters with female KdF artists whose behavior or attire did not correspond to Nazi ideological standards, especially as representative German women. “The [outer] appearance of German female KdF artists here in the East” was addressed in an unsigned text, probably from 1944:

Do German female “artists” really have to walk around in the streets in trousers? With glaring make-up and many items, such as Cossack fur caps, flat caps, etc., purchased to appear as “front-like” as possible? Large green or blue glasses with horn-rimmed frames worn against “the harsh sun of the south” and crazily dyed hair in quiffs complete the image, which is equal parts ridiculous and appalling. The population, which has rarely if ever seen German women before, considers these “ladies” representative of the German woman *per se* and concludes that women in German are all like ‘this.’ Here, these women are called “German gun broads [*Flintenweiber*]” by the soldiers and the population. [BArch R 56 I/37, pag. 6.]<sup>595</sup>

Here, female KdF artists appeared too eccentric and ‘liberated’ to conform to Nazi gender ideas.<sup>596</sup> While I have not found any evidence that KdF attempted to ‘correct’ such behavior on the level of policy making, we can find propagandistic endeavors in this realm. For example, an *Arbeitertum* article from 1942, an excerpt of which is reproduced below, tried to present an alternative gender image of female front artists. This differs greatly from the one perceived (and criticized) by *Wehrmacht* soldiers, commanders and others involved in the organization of front entertainment as described above. Rather than dangerous, sexualized objects, the article focuses on a singer called “Frau Eve” and emphasizes her caring, family-oriented and mother-like qualities. This female front artist takes the time to look at photographs of soldiers’ wives and children – she herself is a mother, as the article makes sure to mention – and (supposedly) even cooks and serves

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<sup>595</sup> This is also quoted and treated by Vossler, who then moves on to discuss in more detail how German troop entertainment dealt with issues of sexuality. (See Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 342.)

<sup>596</sup> It is possible to imagine that these women’s ‘liberation’ was in fact a consequence of their being on the front, far away from Germany.





**Frau Eve: KdF's Ideal "Caring" Female Artist:**  
 Fig. 5.6 *Arbeitertum* entitled "A woman brings Joy to a lonely Post"  
 ("Eva im Schnee: Eine Frau bringt Freude auf einsamen Posten," *Arbeitertum*, Mar. 1, 1942, 9.)

the soldiers food.<sup>597</sup>

Overall, the criticism of KdF for providing the wrong sort of women, or the wrong image of women again supports the claim that KdF was first and foremost concerned with fun, even bawdy fun, for the organization persisted in providing this sort of entertainment despite criticism. The case of Frau Eve highlights a different conception of the woman at the front. As ever, it is hard to judge image from reality when relying

on KdF sources such as *Arbeitertum*. The criticisms from soldiers suggest that we have here a case of discrepancy between KdF's propagated self-image and actual practice. In any case, Frau Eve shares a surprising amount with the part-naked dancers KdF was taken to task about. She is an ideal, but she is an active ideal, actually visiting soldiers and feeding them. Be it a loving, mothering figure like Frau Eve or a lively, sexy chorus

<sup>597</sup> *Wehrmacht* members not only attacked female artists for causing damage in the realm of gender relations and sexuality. Some soldiers complained that KdF artists of both sexes, but especially males, and their performances and inappropriate joking led to frustration and insecurities in regards to matters of sexuality, gender and relationships on the part of audience. In an open letter these soldiers criticized how KdF artists would "constantly drag the relationship between soldiers and women into the mud. You must be aware that many of us have not seen a woman since the last vacation – however long ago that was. That is why we form an ideal image of women. It does not matter whether this is an accurate image or not – for it gives us gives us a large part of the strength that we need to sustain life and war; that is why we absolutely do not like to listen when again and again you bring out your old jokes about 'marriage cripples' or about marital infidelity or when you present the infidelity of our girls as a funny 'matter of course.'" ("Offenes Wort der Soldaten der Kriegsmarine an die Künstler," quoted after Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 305.)

girl, KdF is concerned to bring support, fun or solace to the soldiers at the front. Overall, KdF is clearly concerned with producing actual strength through actual joy – with actual women entertainers at the front – even when this can be said to backfire.

One could argue that KdF's commitment to "joy production" thus opened up spaces for women that were not in concordance with overall Nazi ideology – a configuration that somewhat mirrors my earlier findings discussed in chapter two and three, where I have argued that KdF's work in factories opened up spaces of resistance and loci of agencies for (oppositional) workers and companies managements that were beyond KdF's direct control and interventions, but nevertheless in accordance to the organization's goal of "joy production." The analysis of Paula Stuck's experiences and the criticism about female front artists has also highlighted the absence of Nazi politics and ideology from what KdF did at the front – even though its propaganda, such as in the case of Frau Eve, was at least attempting to reconcile Nazi thought with the new situation and demands of the war.

The case of criticism about female KdF front artists also introduces again the institutional in-fighting about KdF and its activities, which complaints coming from representatives of the *Wehrmacht* or Goebbels and his ministry. To an extent, the end of KdF at the front and in occupied Europe could also be described in such terms. Against KdF's will, its front entertainment was officially shut down after an order by Goebbels in his position of *Reich* Plenipotentiary for Total War<sup>598</sup> on September 1, 1944.<sup>599</sup> To an

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<sup>598</sup> Goebbels had been appointed to this position after Stauffenberg's attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944.

<sup>599</sup> See Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 258. Before that, an order by Goebbels from March 1943 had already significantly curtailed KdF's "joy production" for German soldiers. From then on, in occupied cities with local theaters, extra KdF performances for soldiers had to cease. Generally, the non-military

extent, KdF's "warfare for joy" during World War II had not only been a fight on behalf of German soldiers, but also a struggle for the continuing existence of the organization. However, now this fight was lost, even though KdF attempted to resist for a while.<sup>600</sup> Until the end, KdF had focused on 'producing joy' for German soldiers, arranging primarily light and amusing activities and events. In this, the organization deviated clearly from its previously stated objective of bringing (high) culture to the people. Political content and education was also missing from most of KdF's troop entertainment activities, as had been the case for its work for workers in the pre-war years. KdF retained this approach, ignoring sometimes harsh criticism about the silliness, triviality and vulgarity of its performances and events. We can also see that the leisure organization clearly prioritized quantity over quality. For example, it increasingly employed amateur artists for its "warfare for joy," despite potential repercussions for the quality of its organized programs. This decision was not mainly driven by economic considerations, but rather stems from KdF's agenda of providing as much enjoyment as possible in an active and community-based manner.

During the war, KdF presented its work as an essential means for a German victory, stylizing itself as a comrade to each German soldier, accompanying and assisting

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population was now entirely excluded from any performances for German soldiers. Within Germany, too, performances as part of KdF's troop entertainment could only continue if they were for soldiers in military hospitals or those on furlough. At the Western front and in Norway, troop entertainment was now limited to particularly isolated or locked-in areas (See Kolland, "Faust, Soldatenlieder und 'Wunschkonzert': Deutsche Frontbetreuung," 38.)

<sup>600</sup> According to Murmann, KdF continued to organize leisure, especially for armament workers and wounded soldiers in military hospitals. (Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 263.) One such case could be the above described entertainment for soldiers at the *Café Vaterland*; Majstrak's report refers to winter 1945, i.e. to a period when KdF's troop entertainment had officially ceased. One could consider this a last oppositional act against Goebbels's Propaganda Ministry, whose relationship to KdF was characterized by criticism and competition. On such 'subversive' continuation of KdF troop entertainment, see also Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe*, 362.

him, even at the most remote of places where he might fight for Germany. Indeed, the leisure organization also followed the *Wehrmacht* into newly-German-occupied territories. All over occupied Europe, KdF quickly set up its offices and activities.<sup>601</sup> This swift export of KdF's work speaks to the strong belief in the strengthening power of its "joy production." The newly-exported events primarily targeted Ethnic Germans living in these territories, continuing the effort of building a unified *Volksgemeinschaft* through communally experienced joy that KdF had commenced in Germany in the pre-war years. Again, wartime work by KdF mirrors what we have learned about the organization in previous chapters of this dissertation.

It is impossible to determine the exact impact – if any – that KdF's troop entertainment had on German soldiers, and how much its events ultimately shaped their experience at the front.<sup>602</sup> What we can learn from an analysis of KdF's work in the arena of troop entertainment, however, is that KdF's pre-war focus on light entertainment was still going strong; in fact, the escalated situation of the war possibly even sharpened this approach.<sup>603</sup> Of course, providing entertainment to soldiers was not a unique German phenomenon and also not novel to World War II. But importantly, KdF's work during the war did not change much from what we had seen previously in pre-war Germany. In its adaptation to new situations and audiences, KdF stuck to its goal of "joy production."

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<sup>601</sup> As described above, this 'leisure export' was facilitated in some countries, such as the Netherlands, through KdF-like 'satellite' organizations.

<sup>602</sup> The account discussed above, by soldier Hans K., of his leisure activities at the front shows not only that KdF was merely one amongst several source of entertainment soldiers experienced, but speaks also to the fact that soldiers, while "enjoying" KdF entertainment, might not have attributed this to the leisure organization; in other words, they did not necessarily distinguish the several 'leisure providers' at the front.

<sup>603</sup> A similar development can also be traced for its wartime work at the 'home front' which is described in the following chapter.

Near the battlefields of World War II, KdF not only waged “warfare for joy,” but also “warfare through joy.”

CHAPTER SIX  
“One Must Be Able to Enjoy Oneself”:  
KdF’s Leisure Activities for the German Home Front

When arms speak, the muse must remain silent, this used to be the saying. Today,  
however, we are convinced that the noise of arms and arts are no opposites.<sup>604</sup>

So declaimed Robert Ley, KdF’s leader, shortly after the beginning of the war and capturing in a nutshell KdF’s programmatic orientation from 1939 to 1945. When World War II started, KdF did not abandon its leisure work inside Germany. In fact, it thought doing so would decrease Germany’s chances to succeed in the war and thus argued that only continued work in the sphere of leisure would fully secure Germany’s victory: “The German people again and again gains new strength from the endless sources of the arts, of joy and of its National Socialist idea.”<sup>605</sup> In other words, “German culture” – more precisely, what KdF considered as such – was seen as an indispensable source of strength for Germany, and KdF wanted to provide the means of attaining this source of strength.

On the German home front during World War II, the leisure organization sought to deliver “everyday happiness” in order to sustain the German war effort.<sup>606</sup> The

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<sup>604</sup> BArch NS 22/553; “Waffenlärm und Kunst sind keine Gegensätze: Dr. Ley eröffnete das Deutsche Volksbildungswerk des Reichsprotektorats Böhmen-Mähren,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, Dec. 4, 1939.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Of course, KdF was not the only agent that provided leisure and entertainment for Germans on the home front during World War II. Radio, especially, played an important role; for a discussion of this (and particularly the *Wunschkonzert*, Germany’s most popular radio show during the war,) see Hans-Jörg Koch, *Das Wunschkonzert im NS-Rundfunk* (Cologne; Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2003); on popular music during the Third Reich, see Marc Brüninghaus, *Unterhaltungsmusik im Dritten Reich* (Hamburg: Diplomica-Verl., 2010). Mass entertainment through movies and radio during World War II are discussed in Corey Ross, “Radio, Film and Morale: Wartime Entertainment Between Mobilization and Distraction,” in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela E Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d’Almeida (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 154-174. For an overview of popular

organization's varied undertakings aimed at keeping Germans happy in the face of the difficulties – and later, the destruction and despair – of World War II. How did KdF adapt its work to the war and the war context? One of the new activities was the leisure organization now becoming involved in “taking care” of (some) foreign laborers who worked in Germany during World War II. Here, we will see the power the Nazi belief in “Strength through Joy” assumed during the war; this belief was so strong and pervasive that at times it even trumped feelings of superiority towards those nationalities deemed “racially inferior” by the Nazis.

KdF very much continued its work during the war within Germany, and indeed even extended some of it. In the first place, this is important to demonstrate simply because it closes a gap in the historiography: KdF's wartime work has been a rather understudied topic,<sup>607</sup> making it seem like KdF ceased its operations in Germany when the war started. It did not, and my analysis will trace the constant, and successful,

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culture in the Third Reich, including the war years, see Carsten Würmann, *Im Pausenraum des “Dritten Reiches”: zur Populärkultur im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Bern; New York: Lang, 2008). Michael Maas's case study of leisure time activities in the city of Nuremberg also covers the war period; see Michael Maass, *Freizeitgestaltung und kulturelles Leben in Nürnberg 1930-1945: eine Studie zu Alltag und Herrschaftsausübung im Nationalsozialismus* ([Nürnberg]: Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, 1994). For a discussion of how the regime employed cultural politics to further its war efforts, see Birthe Kundrus, “Totale Unterhaltung? Die kulturelle Kriegsführung 1939-1945 in Film, Rundfunk und Theater,” in *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939-1945*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp, vol. 2 (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2005), 93-158.

<sup>607</sup> To a large extent, the ‘silence’ of scholars on KdF's wartime work can be explained by their usually focusing on KdF's most popular department, the Travel Department. The beginning of the war *did* bring much of KdF travel to a halt, although the Travel Department now focused on organizing hikes in the local environment of people, and on organizing short weekend trips within Germany. [See Hasso Spode, “Arbeiterurlaub Im Dritten Reich,” in *Angst, Belohnung, Zucht Und Ordnung: Herrschaftsmechanismen Im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Carola Sachse et al. (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 298.] Other scholars have primarily seen KdF as an exercise in preparation for war; and such a reading might naturally encourage the thinking that an analysis of its work once the war started was hardly necessary. Lastly, omitting to study KdF's war time activities might also be a reaction to an intuition – or rather, inhibition – against looking at entertainment and happiness in analyses of war, especially a war of the brutal scale waged by the Nazis. However, my dissertation will show that a treatment of KdF in war years is important, not only for the understanding of the leisure organization itself, but also if we want to gain more insight into Germans' everyday life during the war and of Nazi governance in this period.

campaign by the organization to justify its continuing existence in times of war. Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate that KdF not only carried on with its activities, but also maintained the strong emphasis on light entertainment and amusement in its work – despite signature activities such as the Bayreuth Festival, which had, as I will also discuss in this chapter, an ostentatious focus on “bringing high culture” to workers and soldiers. KdF not only continued its work during the war, but did so in a relatively unchanged manner, with a constant focus on fun.

A new stress in that ‘fun factor’ can be seen to emerge, however. My analysis of KdF at the German home front during the war will uncover that a certain *requirement* for Germans to “be happy” emerged. I argue that KdF now *demand*ed a general willingness to be cheerful and “entertain-able” from the German population.<sup>608</sup> Indeed, this is closely related to the claim by KdF about the necessity of its work during the war: KdF posited that happiness – and happy Germans – was a prerequisite to a German victory in the war. And so it was needed even more in this period, its goals all the more necessary. In this logic, KdF appears as crucial player during the war, since it was to be the supplier of this joy and happiness.

All the themes of the chapter that have just been mentioned aspects refer to the intent of KdF’s activities and to their orientation from KdF’s point of view. My chapter will also make two, interrelated arguments to do with the leisure organization’s reception, the view from outside KdF so to speak. First, I show that KdF’s events during the war

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<sup>608</sup> This retraces one of the tensions we continually see in KdF’s concept of ‘joy,’ for was not KdF committed to true joy being voluntarily produced? Some resolution to this version of the conundrum might lie in thinking that a ‘true’ German would voluntarily participate in joy, but not all Germans were actually ‘true.’ But this only replaces the tensions in the concept of ‘joy’ with the tensions in the concept of ‘joy for Germans.’



were popular. Certainly, there was also ample criticism of KdF's undertaking, indications that in terms of reception KdF sometimes overshot the mark when organizing leisure and amusement in times of war, especially when we look at its later period, when the German population suffered from the heavy bombings of German cities. However, KdF events had large attendance numbers; we can thus safely assume that they must have been part of Germans' everyday experience in the *Reich* during the war. An analysis of sources also tells us that, by the end of the war and the Third Reich, KdF and its activities had become an integral, ordinary part of Germans' lives; therewith laying the ground for the enduring prominence of KdF as something to be remembered (positively) about the Nazi period in the post-war Germany.

Before addressing the practices of KdF's work in wartime Germany in more detail, I would like to first look at KdF's public "campaign" for why its activities should indeed continue during this period; a campaign that appears to have been directed at both the German population and Nazi authorities.<sup>609</sup> Such an analysis is instructive, because through it we can see how KdF, at least on a theoretical, conceptual level, adapted to the changed situation the war brought.<sup>610</sup> At the forefront of this campaign was, unsurprisingly, KdF's leader, Robert Ley. We have seen Ley claiming that "the noises of arms and muses" should not be opposites – Ley had first made this claim in December 1939, thereby presenting the core of his argument justifying KdF's wartime activities: the

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<sup>609</sup> I have conducted a similar examination in the previous chapter, which began by looking at KdF's self-representation *vis-à-vis* German soldiers. In fact, both KdF "campaigns" should be considered two facets of the same discourse of justifying the leisure organization's continuous existence during World War II; they are described separately to better incorporate this complex information according to the logic of my chapter divisions.

<sup>610</sup> Of course, describing KdF's agenda here also allows us to "test" how much the organization could realize this throughout the war. However, as pointed out earlier in the dissertation, such analysis cannot be conclusive, since the requisite source materials are not available/existent.

organization would make the “muses” speak, something that would represent a necessary support of the “arms,” i.e. Germany’s fighting. A 1940 publication included a longer statement of his, that elaborated further on this premise. Here, Ley argued as follows:

Every war means a complete restructuring of life. All needs and wishes must stand back behind the sole goal: the strengthening of the military power of the nation. But at the same time, all sources for the preservation and development of the nation’s complete strength must be opened up. Such thing was not realized in 1914. [...] In 1914, any kind of joy was forbidden; today the temples of art are open and one finds that the nation is drinking in the fullest from its culture’s wellspring and enjoys it decently. [Robert Ley, quoted after Arthur Backert, *Feierabend und Freizeit im Kriege* (Bayreuth, 1940), 4.]

Ley’s statement emphasizes KdF’s ambition to both fully commit its work to Germany’s war effort and at the same to secure the continuation of leisure events in the war period. He fends off any potential attacks that would argue that in such a difficult period there is no time and money for these kinds of activities: conversely, Ley and other KdF functionaries claimed that entertainment and ‘providing happiness’ for Germans was indispensable for a German victory. Ley’s allusion to 1914, and the supposed neglect then of happiness, yokes KdF’s role tightly to the general Nazi promise of overcoming earlier German failures in World War I. In the words of Shelley Baranowski, KdF’s primary motive began in the Nazi regime’s “desire to avoid a repetition of 1918, when the collapse of civilian resolve brought the removal of the monarchy and the emergence of the Weimar ‘system.’”<sup>611</sup> The “Weimar system” had already been replaced with a better regime, and now this regime, if its central pillars – strong among them, “joy” for Germans arranged by KdF – were only maintained, could not be defeated in World War II.

An analysis of KdF’s self-representation for the German civilian population

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<sup>611</sup> Shelley Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214.

during the war must, of course, turn once more to its magazine *Arbeitertum*. Its war-time coverage of leisure activities was based on its proclaimed faith in an eventual German victory. An article from May 1940, for example, was entitled: “After the victory, we again travel southwards: Memories of the first trip of the KdF ship “Robert Ley to Tenerife, Spain.” Not only does this title reflect the magazine’s firm (official) belief in a German victory, but it also implies that this victory would function in a beneficiary manner for leisure through KdF. In addition, however, this article also displays another trend in *Arbeitertum*’s “reporting” during World War II. During this time, its articles often had a commemorative, wistful tone.<sup>612</sup> Sometimes, this went so far that these articles were merely “memories” of earlier KdF trips, rather than news reports about current events or activities.<sup>613</sup> If “newer” leisure activities were covered in the magazine, their smaller scale in comparison to the pre-war years was discussed, often in an assumed nostalgic tone that dwelled more on elaborate past activities. In other words, KdF now often “sold” its work by referring to previous achievements, while at the same time noting the necessity for scaling down during war time:

Before the war, KdF had made accessible all of Germany and the world to [hard-working German people’s comrades]. Trains traveled day by day through the country, full of German workers-vacationers. The ships of our KdF fleet crisscrossed the seas and showed the beauties of the world to tens of thousands. Now, during the war, everybody knows that we need our railways for other purposes and that the KdF ships are displaced by the steel warriors of our fighting fleet. Naturally disciplined, the German worker has accepted this. He knows that the KdF trips will revive much larger and more beautiful, after [Germany’s] victory. [“Osterwanderung mit KdF,” *Arbeitertum*, Apr. 15, 1940,

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<sup>612</sup> Baranowski reflects on both this nostalgic tone and the inherently promissory character with the title of her (rather cursory) chapter on KdF’s work during World War II: “Memories of the Past and Promises for the Future: Strength through Joy in Wartime.” (See *Ibid.*, 199ff.)

<sup>613</sup> Generally, once the war began, *Arbeitertum* turned most of its attention to reporting about the leisure organization’s efforts in the realm of troop entertainment; coverage of leisure activities for the civilian population correspondingly took a backseat.

rear page.]

This paragraph illustrates how KdF publicly dealt with the war and its constraints upon the organization's practices within Germany. Limitations were acknowledged, but were always connected to the promise that the war would eventually lead to a greater range of leisure activities and even more happiness for the German population. KdF's happiness was thus not only the means to gain a German victory; a Germany victory would, it was believed in turn, result in even greater happiness –again also provided through KdF: “The wages of victory would be enjoyment.”<sup>614</sup>



**Good Times Despite War:**

Fig. 6.1. “Summer without him” [“Sommer ohne ‘ihn,’” *Illustrierter Beobachter* 37 (1940), 951.]

In this context it is important to note that KdF's popularity and success was not only based on such promises, but also on the fact that it had already partially delivered on these – even in times of war. This is at least what the Nazi publications wanted to convey. For example, a 1940 article in the *Illustrierter Beobachter*, entitled “*Sommer ohne ‘ihn’*” [“Summer without ‘him,’”] addresses the free-time of young women whose boyfriends and husbands were away at the front. Given the topic, one

might expect a rather sober treatment. However, the opposite is the case: the

<sup>614</sup> Ross, “Radio, Film and Morale: Wartime Entertainment Between Mobilization and Distraction,” 161. Ross does not refer specifically to KdF, but his argument, directed at German war entertainment in general, fits quite well with my argument about KdF as a joy-producer for victory, in order to reach an even more joyful situation for all Germans after such victory. I would also agree with Ross's assessment that the promise of future satisfaction after German victory [...] was [...] a principal war aim.” (Ibid.)

accompanying photos show several young women, smiling and laughing, who seem to greatly enjoy themselves (see above.)<sup>615</sup> The article's rather short text reads as follows:

In between all these days of work, whose heightened intensity Germans cheerfully accepts like no other people does, a small break is also justified from time to time. For this especially, national socialist leadership, unlike any other, has a deep appreciation. Strength through Joy is a very wise knowledge. This joy should not get a raw deal, especially now, in a time that requires more strength than ever before!" ["Sommer ohne 'ihn,'" *Illustrierter Beobachter* 37 (1940), 951.]

The article presents the war period, despite its deprivations – here in the form of absent men – as a time of joy and fun, and the Nazi regime, and especially its organization KdF, are given credit for this development.

KdF's wartime presentation of its work was, as we can see from the previous discussion, always closely linked to Germany's war effort. Any constraints on its work and the consequent inadequacies were presented as necessary sacrifices, while the organization and its functionaries and commentators generally made sure to emphasize how much KdF's work was indeed a crucial element of German's war effort. A German victory would lead to a higher-level of the happiness brought by KdF, but already in times of war, KdF was, so its claim, constantly improving Germans well-being at the home front. This "partial delivery" of a larger promise – here "evidenced" through an article about German women's joy in the summer of 1940 – is an important theme for KdF in general, not only during the war. It is through this element, I would argue, that KdF developed its greatest power and attractiveness for Germans, and it is how it indeed helped to augment the popularity of the Nazi state and so further its stability.

Before exploring, the kind of practices KdF continued throughout the war and on

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<sup>615</sup> I think it is fair to speculate that the main objective for publishing the article was in fact to the wish to show off young, pretty women in short summer clothing.

what scale this occurred, it needs to be recognized that KdF's continuous efforts to entertain the German population were indeed part of a more general shift towards more entertainment for Germans during the war. Corey Ross described this as follows:

Perverse though it may seem, the very years in which the Nazis unleashed the most destructive war in history actually marked a high point in the legitimization and popular consumption of public amusements. Never before were Germans so encouraged to indulge in light entertainments, and never before was it so accepted by governing elites. Paradoxically, it was precisely amid the mounting calls for discipline and self-sacrifice that the regime placed the greatest emphasis on pleasure. [Corey Ross, "Radio, Film and Morale: Wartime Entertainment Between Mobilization and Distraction," in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela E Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d'Almeida (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 156.]

KdF saw itself as the pioneer of providing the war-time pleasure described by Ross. The breadth of its wartime activities can be exemplified looking at its activities in the *Gau* Bayreuth.<sup>616</sup> According to a *Gau* report, KdF's Leisure Time Department had mainly been busy there in three areas in 1943. First, it organized public events, such as concerts, vaudeville events, and theater performances, as well as social and singing evenings.<sup>617</sup> Second, it was involved in the entertainment of (injured) German soldiers, organizing 168 events "of various kinds," for a total of 43,680 attendees. Third, the department organized cultural leisure time events for the wives of soldiers.<sup>618</sup> The Bayreuth KdF was also active with its Sports Departments and the Department of Travel, Hiking and Vacation in 1943<sup>619</sup> and continued to offer classes through its Institute for the Education of the

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<sup>616</sup> Until 1942, this was the "*Gau Bayrische Ostmark*."

<sup>617</sup> In 1943 this included 18 concerts with 9,300 attendees, 14 large vaudeville events with about 11,000 attendees, 53 theatrical performances with over 25,000 attendees, 27 social evenings with 14,700 guests and 8 singing evenings with almost 5,000 attendees.

<sup>618</sup> Since fall 1943, there had been six events of this kind, which according to the DAF/KdF, "enjoyed in every respect great popularity."

<sup>619</sup> Through its Sports Department, the *Gau*'s KdF organized Factory Sport Musters in the larger companies, with overall 13,480 attendees. The *Gau*'s Travel Department led 510 hikes and guided urban

German People.<sup>620</sup> In its publications, KdF made sure to emphasize that this breadth of activities was made possible despite new obstacles the war period had brought.<sup>621</sup>

For a closer look at KdF's wartime work for German civilians on the national level, let's start by exploring the sphere of theater. The previous chapter has demonstrated KdF's predominance in the organization of front theater. On the German home front, too, KdF increased its efforts as the organizer of theater and opera performances after the beginning of the war. In the *Gau* Berlin alone, KdF claimed to have made available, from the beginning of the war, one million tickets for theater performances. The theater shows were "very versatile," encompassing "classical and traditional dramas, large representative orchestras, such as the Berlin and the Viennese Philharmonic Orchestras, chamber music groups, vaudeville and cabaret events, [...] puppetry [and] ballet." These KdF events in Berlin had the following distribution: 40% theatrical performances (opera, operetta, plays and comedies), 15% concerts, 30% cabaret events and 15% pure vaudeville performances.<sup>622</sup> Especially as 'cabaret evenings' could also refer to stand-up comedy and that the proportion of comedies and operetta in the "theatrical performances" segment was probably not small, this distribution speaks to

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tours with over 8,000 participants. (See BArch NS 5 I/ 148; letter to the DAF Gau-Administration Bayreuth, Feb. 18, 1944.)

<sup>620</sup>These educational courses of the *Volksbildungswerk* in the *Gau* Bayreuth drew an enrollment of almost 500 people, in addition to 14 lectures and slide shows with a total of 7,480 visitors in 1943. (See *ibid.* 0)

<sup>621</sup> A 1940 brochure put out by the *Gau* KdF listed the obstacles KdF had to overcome during its wartime work – "the re-direction of public traffic [...] [and others'] usage of motor vehicles, the usage of halls for other important purposes, the blackout, numerous conscriptions of voluntary and full-time employees as well as of artists" [Arthur Backert, *Feierabend und Freizeit im Kriege* (Bayreuth, 1940), 3.] Overall, the brochure pointed out that any the additional efforts these circumstances required were essential.

<sup>622</sup> Bodo Lafferentz, *Die NS-Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude im Kriegsjahr 1941* (Verl. d. Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1942), 13.

KdF's emphasis on light, above-all amusing entertainment.<sup>623</sup> KdF did not give up its focus on "joy production."

This emphasis is also visible from an analysis that looks at the landscape of KdF-influenced theater for all of Germany. Nationwide KdF's "theatre empire" grew significantly during the war. Several formerly private theaters were taken over by the leisure organization, including Hanover's *Mellini Theater*, Dessau's *Friedrich Theater*, the *Apollo Theater* in Cologne and the *Zentraltheater* in Magdeburg. From 1940 on, KdF had also established the *Märchentheater der KdF* [Fairy Tale Theater of KdF] in Berlin.<sup>624</sup> In addition, it continued its performances in theaters it had acquired in the pre-war years, such as the *Theater des Volkes* [Theater of the People] and the *Volksoper* [Opera of the People,] both in Berlin.<sup>625</sup> As discussed in chapter one, *Theater des Volkes* had already in 1936 begun to exclusively stage light-hearted operettas.<sup>626</sup> This characteristic emphasis on light entertainment is also clearly visible in the new acquisitions just listed: Hannover's *Mellini Theater* had been considered one of the

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<sup>623</sup> In 1941, an official KdF report lists 109,000 cultural events for Germany overall, which were supposed to have been visited by 42 million visitors. If accurate, this number is quite impressive, given that the 1939 German census counted a German population of ca. 79 million; this would mean that, numerically, every second German visited a KdF event in 1942 alone. [See *Ibid.*, 23f. The population count is based on a German area that includes the Saar region, Austria and the former Lithuanian (from 1923-1930) Memel Territory. Of course, the visitor numbers, if they are correct in the first place, do not account for numerous visits to events by the same individuals.] Other ongoing KdF activities took place under the aegis of the Institute for the Education of the People: 367 offices of the institutes, the so-called *Volksbildungsstätten*, were active in 1941, and the institute's participation number since 1936 reached 10.5 million [cf. Lafferentz, *KdF im Kriegsjahr 1941*, 23f.]

<sup>624</sup> See Thomas Eicher, Barbara Panse, and Henning Rischbieter, *Theater im "Dritten Reich": Theaterpolitik, Spielplanstruktur, NS-Dramatik* (Seelze-Velber: Kallmeyer, 2000), 32.

<sup>625</sup> The *Theater des Volkes*, especially, continued to be rather popular during the war: in the season 1941-42, it reached an audience of 1.1 million, which increased to 1.2 in the following season. It remained open until June 1944, when it stopped its performances due to damage to the theater buildings caused by Allied bomb attacks. (See *ibid.*, 85.)

<sup>626</sup> See *Ibid.*, 84.



leading vaudeville theaters around the turn of the century;<sup>627</sup> brochures for the *Apollo Theater* indicate the same focus, and Magdeburg's *Zentraltheater* was also popular for its vaudeville performances and operettas.<sup>628</sup> In other words, when KdF said "theater" during the war it meant mostly "vaudeville theater." Therefore, an analysis of its war work in this sector clearly highlights – again – KdF's focus on light amusement.

A *New York Times* article from summer 1940 announced that "the war, for the German theaters, has come to have a meaning synonymous with a boom," reporting that in the winter of 1939/1940, "the theatres in every part of the country have been doing the most rushing business of their history."<sup>629</sup> The article detected a new "culture-consciousness" among Germans, and partially credited KdF's head organization, the German Labor Front, for this development.<sup>630</sup> Of course, in the in the light of previous

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<sup>627</sup> Klaus Mlynek and Dirk Böttcher, *Stadtlexikon Hannover von den Anfängen bis in die Gegenwart* (Hannover: Schlütersche, 2009), 437.

<sup>628</sup> On Magdeburg's theater, see the online chronicle of Magdeburg, "The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, 1900-1945," [www.magdeburg-tourist.de/index.phtml?La=2&sNavID=115.4&mNavID=37.9&object=tx|115.14.2|115.1.2&sub=0](http://www.magdeburg-tourist.de/index.phtml?La=2&sNavID=115.4&mNavID=37.9&object=tx|115.14.2|115.1.2&sub=0) [last accessed: April 11, 2012]. For Cologne's Apollo Theater, a brochure of its guest performance in occupied Paris in 1941 announces a program consisting of ballet and acrobatics. (See KdF-Theater Apollo, Köln, *Gastspiel in Paris, 1941* [theater program booklet], Apollo Köln Paris Jun. 1941; photos can see at [http://www.janssen-militaria.com/oscommerce/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=5124](http://www.janssen-militaria.com/oscommerce/product_info.php?products_id=5124) [last accessed: April 11, 2012].)

<sup>629</sup> "The Berlin theatre has a boom," *The New York Times*, Jul. 7, 1940, X1.

<sup>630</sup> Furthermore, the article details that the previous winter had also seen an increase of new premières unprecedented in Germany for some time. Interestingly, there was no emphasis on German classics, but instead "authors of almost every European nationality made their first appearance on German stages." In addition to a renaissance of Russian arts and Czech playwrights (Smetana), there was also a revival of Shakespeare and Ibsen plays. While this selection does not speak of heightened German patriotism embodied in the theater, the article concluded by mentioning that "in recent weeks, there has been a crop of political plays in Berlin, the most notable of which was the first German performance of Benito Mussolini's "Cavour," which opened with much Axis pomp and ceremony." (Ibid.) Later, as Richard Evans points out in his work on wartime Nazi Germany, "there was also a ban on performances of plays by authors belonging to enemy states (though occasional exceptions were made for Shakespeare.) Chekhov was allowed before 22 June, 1941, but not thereafter." [Richard Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 568.]

analyses of what KdF actually offered in these theaters, it needs to be noted that this “culture-consciousness” was not one related to “high culture,” but might more accurately reflect the audience interest to go to theaters to see light operettas, comedies and even vaudeville shows.

But whatever the show, to the theaters the Germans went – this boom was also detected by the SD, the SS’s security agency, which commented that “during the war, very many theaters can report visitors in numbers that have scarcely been experienced before. In the big cities it is hardly possible to obtain theater tickets through regular box-office sales.”<sup>631</sup> Walter Rischer’s case study of Düsseldorf’s cultural politics during the Third Reich confirms this assessment for ‘his city’ – he shows that there was an increase in the number of theater visitors in Düsseldorf.<sup>632</sup> During the war, there were increasing technical difficulties in Düsseldorf’s municipal theater houses: due to staff shortages, only the plays with reduced artistic and technological demands were put on; the audience numbers, however, were always impressive. In 1943, these numbers rose even higher than had ever been attained in the prewar years.<sup>633</sup> Rischer cites three reasons for this development: the German population’s increased interest in opportunities for relaxation and distraction, a considerable number of theatrical events that functioned as entertainment for *Wehrmacht* soldiers and KdF’s purchase of large blocks of tickets.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> SD-report from Feb. 26, 1942; quoted after Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> See Walter Rischer, *Die Nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik in Düsseldorf 1933-1945* (Düsseldorf: Triltsch, 1972), 167. Michael Maas also describes a similar increase for the city of Nuremberg; here, the number of KdF organized plays on municipal stages rose from 118 in the season of 1939-40 to 148 in 1941-42 and then 162 in 1943-44. (See Maass, *Freizeitgestaltung und kulturelles Leben in Nürnberg 1930-1945*, 332.)

<sup>633</sup> See Rischer, *Die Nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik in Düsseldorf 1933-1945*, 167.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

These three reasons are indeed closely interrelated and can indeed all, directly or indirectly, be linked to KdF. As we know from the previous chapter, KdF was also running the entertainment of troops; so some, if not all, of these *Wehrmacht* events should also be attributed to KdF. Similarly, the population's interest in more distraction, and KdF's tickets purchases or general involvement, should not be considered unrelated occurrences. In other words, one could credit KdF with the popularity of theater events in Düsseldorf (and Berlin.) KdF could thus be seen as the agency which most successfully responded to the fact that "most theatre-goers, especially the new ones, were in search above all of the entertainment."<sup>635</sup> The picture Rischer draws of Düsseldorf reflects is broadly characteristic for all of Germany; KdF's activities in the theater were extensive and met with constantly rising interest.

KdF's main goal through its entertainment was to "bring happiness." For this the organization tended to 'sacrifice' its original goal of "bringing culture" to the German people. Officially, however, KdF never abdicated its "cultural" goal. In fact, one of its largest undertakings during the war, especially in its marketing and public reach, was the clearest possible embodiment of this ambition: the Bayreuth Festival, the annual performance of Richard Wagner's works in his opera house in Bayreuth, Bavaria. However, whether this cultural prestige project for KdF during the war years was indeed successful in realizing KdF's goal of bringing joy and culture is arguable, as my following discussion will show.

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<sup>635</sup> Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 568. Evans points out that theater directors "were told that that pessimistic or depressing plays were not to be put on." To an extent, this contradicted a declaration from Goebbels from the beginning of the war, which asked theaters to shy away from "exaggeration and stylelessness that go against the seriousness of the times and the national feeling of the people." (Telegram by Goebbels from Nov. 27, 1939; quoted after *ibid.*) Overall, it was this contradiction between Goebbels's demands and KdF's practice that lay at the ground for the conflict between the two.

KdF's involvement in Bayreuth was symbolically significant on several other levels, not just for displaying its commitment to opening up areas of "high culture" to all Germans. First, by continuing the festival during the war, KdF set a deliberate sign that not all (cultural) life ceased in this period – something that should be read as a display of strength. Furthermore, Richard Wagner was one of Hitler's favorite composers; his daughter-in-law, Winifred Wagner, who ran the festival after 1930, was an ardent early supporter and friend of Hitler. Both these facts helped to make Wagner's music a quasi-official soundtrack of the Third Reich. In fact, KdF's taking over the Bayreuth Festival is said to have been prompted by Hitler's statement: "I want us to have the most beautiful and best culture. I do not want the German culture to be, like in England, only for the upper crust [of society, "*die oberen Zehntausend*,"] I want it to benefit the entire German nation."<sup>636</sup> "War Festivals" [*"Kriegsfestspiele"*] in Bayreuth<sup>637</sup> were then instituted following an order by Hitler from April 1940, and KdF was in charge of their organization. The festival's audience was now to consist of (wounded) soldiers and workers in armament factories.<sup>638</sup> Robert Ley explained KdF's task at Bayreuth's "Green Hill" as follows:

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<sup>636</sup> Adolf Hitler, quoted after Brigitte Hamann, *Die Familie Wagner* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2005), 123.

<sup>637</sup> Hitler ordered this against the plans of Bayreuth's head, Winifred Wagner; see Erich Ebermayer, *Magisches Bayreuth, Legende und Wirklichkeit*. (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1951), 214. and Hamann, *Die Familie Wagner*, 123.

<sup>638</sup> There already had been links between Bayreuth and KdF before the war. In 1939, the leisure organization bought 7,000 tickets, which it then re-sold for the reduced priced of 10 RM (that is for a third of the regular price), allegedly mainly to German workers via distributions in German factories. (See Max Lenz, "Der deutsche Arbeiter in Bayreuth: 7000 KdF-Gäste besuchen die Festspiele in Bayreuth," *Arbeitertum*, Sep. 1, 1939, 6.) According to this *Arbeitertum* article, in many cases the companies paid for the tickets and the travel expenses. KdF also made sure "that the performances were [...] met with the necessary understanding" by organizing lectures on Wagner's operas for German workers attending the festival. (See *ibid.*)

In these grim times of war, too, we want to prove to the people and to the world that we carry the arts to the workers and to the soldiers, to the broadest masses of the people. Culture and arts are not only for the few, and they are not closed off by a high wall from the people. We consider it our task to impart our great cultural treasure to the widest masses. I do not think that can be done in any better way than here in Bayreuth. [...] this year, in the year of war, Bayreuth's performance [is] only for the worker and the soldier. In this way, we want to express that Germany's cultural treasure during war [...] is [at the service of] those who are making the largest sacrifices for their people. That is how the *Führer* has ordered it, that was his will. [Robert Ley, quoted after Backert, *Feierabend und Freizeit im Kriege*, 7.]

Under the leadership of KdF's executive director Bodo Lafferentz,<sup>639</sup> the leisure organization arranged for the transport of workers and soldiers to Bayreuth, as well as for their room and board. KdF also organized the ticket distributions. All of this was free of charge for the attending workers and soldiers; all costs were covered by KdF. Winifred Wagner continued to be responsible for the artistic part, and the required musicians and singers were excused from military service. The first Bayreuth "War Festival" then took place in the summer of 1940; it was highly publicized, even in the international press.<sup>640</sup> Propagandistically, the Bayreuth War Festival was clearly a success.

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<sup>639</sup> Lafferentz later tightened his connections to Bayreuth in through his marriage, in 1943, to Richard Wagner's granddaughter Verena; see Brigitte Hamann, *Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth* (Orlando, Fla: Harcourt, 2005).

<sup>640</sup> The *Chicago Daily Tribune* stated that the festival was "devoted as spiritual reward to wounded soldiers and laborers employed at the front and in the armament industries, who will be honored guests of the 'Strength Thru Joy' [sic] organization." ("Wagner Festival," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jul. 7, 1940.) The *New York Times*, too, covered the festival's inauguration, quoting Robert Ley's statement of his attitude towards the festival and the organizing of culture and leisure in times of war: "War is no punishment, but rather the ultimate and most beautiful test of the strength of the German people and their fitness to live." According to this article, the festival, which was "being produced on a scale as elaborate as in peace time" drew an audience of "some 1,250 soldiers and workers." ("Baireuth [sic] Festival Opens on War Note," *New York Times*, Jul. 17, 1940.)

For the 1940 Bayreuth festival, KdF/DAF took over 700,000 *Reichsmark* of the total cost. According to Geerte Murmann, the overall cost of the 1940 festival was 1, 234, 207 RM, of which 500,000 RM were paid by the Party Chancellery. (See Geerte Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg: Deutsches und Alliiertes Fronttheater* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992), 124f.) Rischbieter, however, claims that, in addition to the 700,000 RM from the DAF/KdF, the 1940 Bayreuth festival was supported by 400,000 RM from the private funds of Adolf Hitler; see Eicher, Panse, and Rischbieter, *Theater im "Dritten Reich"*, 32.

But what about the reaction of its “new” audiences? According to a postwar account, they received the Wagner Festival very positively. The author Erich Ebermayer describes the workers’ and soldiers’ “eyes shining” with joy stronger than any that had ever been the case for audiences in Bayreuth before: “Soundlessly, deeply emotionally, they followed the plays [operas], at which the best German artists sought to give their best.”<sup>641</sup> This description very much resembles those found in (propagandistic) news coverage of the event during the Third Reich – for example by KdF’s magazine *Arbeitertum*. Here, workers and soldiers appear as “enraptured and breathless” when listening, the performances succeeded by a “deeply moved silence.”<sup>642</sup>

The SD, the intelligence agency of the SS, also drew a very positive conclusion in its *Meldungen aus dem Reich*. Broad circles of the German population would have taken notice of the execution of the war festival, the SD observed, seeing it “as a new sign of the interior strength of Germany” and appreciating it “as particularly honoring [...] the class of manual workers.” The SD also collected very positive feedback from participants, who described the organization of the event as “exemplary” and “fabulous.” For many, the immediate experience of the festival itself appeared to have been so positively overwhelming, that upon return home, they could find no words to describe it. Thus, to an extent, the 1940 Bayreuth Festival not only “further[ed] the sympathy of the working population for [...] *Kraft durch Freude*, but more generally for the [Nazi]

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<sup>641</sup> Ebermayer, *Magisches Bayreuth*, 215. Ebermayer’s account suggests that he might have been a personal acquaintance of Winifred Wagner; this might also be why he received a ticket for the war festival.

<sup>642</sup> Richard Kopsch-Rossin, “Arbeiter und Soldaten erleben Bayreuth. Als Gäste des Führers besuchen sie mit KdF. die Richard-Wagner-Kriegsfestspiele,” *Arbeitertum*, Aug. 15, 6. A similar assessment of the overwhelming emotions of the audience is repeated in a later *Arbeitertum* article (cf. Heinrich Guthmann, “Bayreuth: Arbeiter und Soldaten erleben die Festspiel in lautloser Ergriffenheit,” *Arbeitertum*, Aug. 1, 1941, 7.)

party.”<sup>643</sup> A similarly positive assessment was given of the 1943 festival, whose guests “were completely enthused and satisfied.”<sup>644</sup> Several attendees left enthusiastic testimonies, such as a female Reich Labor service leader (“I am so happy to have experienced this;”) a female armament worker from East Prussia (“I will never forget this. What I have seen and heard here, I will only realize at home, where I will be able to properly process this;”) or a soldier who had lost his eyesight in the war (“I could stay here forever and listen to the sounds and the singing, which moved me into a different world.”) These statements certainly suggest that KdF’s “joy-bringing” effort was having the desired effects. A woman from Düsseldorf said that her visit to Bayreuth would positively affect her work life and productivity: “The performance has given me new courage and strength for my coming work.” The attendees equally recognized KdF’s work towards supporting the war effort – a “heavily wounded soldier” exclaimed: “It is worthwhile to fight until the end for a people that is capable of such cultural events in times of need.”<sup>645</sup>

However, there were also reports, notably from non-Nazi sources, but some also by agencies of the regime, which drew a somewhat different picture of KdF’s work in Bayreuth and its “success.” Some of them point at the “misbehavior” of visitors to Bayreuth’s *Kriegsfestival*, suggesting the reception of the event was not always 100%

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<sup>643</sup> SD-report from Aug. 26, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 1508.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid. It is important to emphasize that SD reports were for internal use only, i.e. these sources were not used for propaganda or published. This means that they were sometimes openly critical of the work of KdF or other Nazi agencies; in fact, the SD reports had an internal control function within the regime. This background makes the reports more reliable as a source for assessing the reception of KdF’s activities in Bayreuth – the positive reactions described here were not chronicled for any propagandistic reasons (and so not presumably not overblown for that purpose.)

positive. The inappropriate behavior included “negative appearances,” such as “guests selling their tickets for alcohol or other scarce commodities” or “being asleep during the performances due to ignorance or lack of interest.”<sup>646</sup> It appears that KdF’s project of “bringing culture” to Germans was not always reciprocated in the manner the organization wished for.<sup>647</sup>

The Bayreuth *Kriegsfestspiele* ran until summer 1944, but the performances were increasingly disturbed by the war and the limitations it imposed. Accordingly, the last year’s festival was reduced to the performance of only one opera, *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*.<sup>648</sup> In the four years of its tenure, the festival produced 70 performances, and KdF arranged visits by approximately 100,000 attendees.<sup>649</sup> The *Kriegsfestspiele* was KdF’s most powerful message that its work still went on during the war – a message that was also meant for the international public. It can be also read as a signal from KdF that

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<sup>646</sup> SD-report from Sept. 27, 1943, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 5809. The report asserted reassuringly, however, that by 1943 this did not happen anymore. This might be partly due to the fact that the guests who were now chosen to receive the trip, including lodging, meals and tickets for free, were more carefully selected not only because they were injured, deployed to the front or employed in the armament industry, but because they actually had genuine interest in Wagner’s music. Musical interest, was also stressed as a criteria of selection for guests in a 1941 *Arbeitertum* article; cf. Heinrich Guthmann, “Bayreuth: Arbeiter und Soldaten erleben die Festspiele in lautloser Ergriffenheit,” *Arbeitertum*, Aug. 1, 1941, 7.

Similar evidence of workers’ and soldiers’ non-interest in the high culture of which they had been, according to KdF, deprived for so long, can be found for the Salzburg festival. Paul Hörbiger, a famous Austrian actor, reported: “At the next performance, the soldiers had to sign a form upon entering, so that they really would go in. They then really went in – but then directly left again at the other side, in order to sell their tickets to those people from Salzburg who waited there.” Paul Hörbiger, quoted after Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 125.

<sup>647</sup> One could of course also read this as a confirmation, that KdF’s general choice on prioritizing “low” over “high” culture was one in line with the wishes of large part of audiences.

<sup>648</sup> It might be more than a coincidence that *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* is the only comedy among Wagner’s mature works – this can be read as yet another piece of evidence for my argument regarding KdF’s strong emphasis on “joy production.” The last performance of this opera at Bayreuth, on August 9, 1944 was also the last opera performance in the Third Reich; see Hamann, *Winifred Wagner*, 377.

<sup>649</sup> See Ebermayer, *Magisches Bayreuth*, 215.



it had never entirely given up its goal of bringing “high culture” to the workers. However, there are several reports that undermine this propagandistic effect. Reports such as the one mentioned above speak instead to the discomfort of workers with these “high culture” performances. This gives further evidence to the claim that such undertakings did indeed fail overall.

In some sense, one could read this as a confirmation, that KdF was otherwise ‘right on track’ by sacrificing the goal of “bringing “high culture” to providing light entertainment as part of its agenda of “joy production.” Overall, KdF’s work organizing the “War Festival” was highly significant for KdF’s propaganda during the war in general terms; importantly, KdF was involved in such a huge undertaking focused in particular on the organization’s original goal of “bringing culture” to workers. This, however, again, had mostly propagandistic motivation and should not be seen as a representative image of KdF’s wartime work overall. In fact, KdF’s work in Bayreuth was an exception; it tried to push “high German culture” on at times unappreciative audiences, and thus deviated from the general trend according to which KdF is generally rather audience-responsive. In other words, KdF often leaned towards pleasing its audiences, which seems to have been often achieved through amusing, simple and light entertainments, such as vaudeville or “*Bunte Abende*.” At the same time, KdF’s work at Bayreuth, however, is clearly *not* discounted from KdF’s goal of “joy production” *per se*, nor from its motivations to produce strength through this joy and that of building community. Listening to German classical music such as that by Wagner was, of course, considered a “joyful” activity by KdF organizers which would have edifying and strengthening effects on the audiences; that these consisted of workers and soldiers was to help unification of the segments of

German society.<sup>650</sup>

Let's leave Bayreuth's "Green Hill" and move on to KdF's work on the shop floor, which I have explored for the peacetime years of KdF operations in chapters two and three of this dissertation. The following section of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of how KdF's activities in German factories developed throughout the war. Generally, the leisure organization's efforts to entertain and "strengthen" German workers continued. In what reads as an attempt to justify this continuation despite what seemed to some the more "urgent," new demands of war, Robert Ley argued in 1942 in a letter to *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler:

it is necessary that we Germans have the last battalions and the best weapons at the end of the war on the battlefield. That is why today, during the war, it is doubly important to promote all that which German Labor Front has built already in peace times. Of course, these measures have their limits where the necessary material and time is not available. Matters such as Beauty of Labor or Travel, Hiking and Vacations, must now, during the war, stand back. But that obligates us even more to give to the working people those things that we can still give today: culture, KdF-events, fitness sports, distraction and relaxation after work, etc. [BArch NS 19/2636, pag. 10-11; letter to Reichsführer SS from Robert Ley, Dec. 14, 1942.]

Ley also stressed later in this letter that KdF's events should prioritize distraction and relaxation – in other words, "joy production" – over ideological education or military preparation. In this context, he warns: "Nothing would be more fatal than, to be put into a dismal state [of mind] by [following] false moralizers." While taking a stance pro happiness and light entertainment, however, Ley was also careful to emphasize the

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<sup>650</sup> Such community building was not only assumed for between the participants, soldiers and armament workers, but also between them and the artists and, more abstractly, with those strata of German society that built the 'traditional' audience of classical music.

Conversely, a KdF goal could hardly be fulfilled in Bayreuth was that of active participation; the festival only allowed for – long periods – of passive listening. Of course, such passivity was element of many KdF events; while this clearly contradicted KdF's overall agenda, the leisure organization never really addressed it. (The lectures about Wagner mentioned above [see footnote 638] do indicate an effort by KdF to make the new audiences more informed and active.)

difference between KdF's leisure time work on the one side and that of other countries – and Germany in former times – on the other: “It is equally impossible, that we devote ourselves now in these hard times to wild Bacchus-like entertainments and orgies, as it was the case during the [First] World War and as we hear it is today from New York and London.” Ley was very concerned to show how unique and superior ‘his’ leisure work was. Additionally, this can also be read as his response to those voices criticizing a certain vulgarity and low quality of KdF events; I will address these critiques in more detail later in this chapter. Meanwhile, note that Ley offered a compromise: “joy,” but in a reasonable and healthy manner. He claims that it was necessary “to find a healthy and rational middle ground, which will bring a few harmless hours of joy and recreation to the working people after their hard labor.”<sup>651</sup>

One example for KdF's continued leisure work for workers throughout the war is the Osram company in Berlin. In fall/winter 1943, for example, the company hosted, in cooperation with KdF, several “Comradeship Evenings.” These evenings offered a mixed bag of performances by all kinds of musicians, acrobats, dancers, and comedians. Generally, these evenings lacked a political component and the program bills listed no speeches. Instead, the evenings' emphasis was clearly on light, amusing entertainment; “heavy,” classical or German-*völkisch* content was rarely included. Most of the shows were circus-like, without any intention of fostering German patriotism.<sup>652</sup> In addition to these events organized specifically for Osram workers, the company's KdF attendants made tickets available to Osram employees for theater and musical performances by the

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<sup>651</sup> BArch NS 19/2636, pag. 11; letter by Robert Ley to the *Reichsführer-SS*, Dec. 14, 1942.

<sup>652</sup> Other events organized for Osram workers in the 1940s included movies or slide shows, and a KdF sponsored trip to an ice hockey game; see LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 665.

Berlin Philharmonic orchestra, KdF's *Theater des Volkes*, the *Scala*, *Plaza* and the *Rose Theater* or the *Staatsoper*.<sup>653</sup> Again, the list of theater and musical performances at these venues – including the *Philharmonie* and the *Staatsoper* – tends to exclude “serious” pieces, and is instead consonant with KdF's clear emphasis on bringing workers light, amusing, “joy producing” art. Providing comical relief was important as KdF believed it to be an essential means for keeping up morale during war years.<sup>654</sup>

Leisure activities and entertainment on the shop floor are also recounted by Gerd Wysocki in his book on the Hermann-Göring-Werke (HGW) in Salzgitter. He mentions singing and sport communities as well as film, vaudeville and cabaret events organized by KdF for HGW workers, pointing out that even “famous artists such as Marita Gründgens or the comedian Heinz Ehrhard occasionally gave guest performances.” How popular these events were is expressed through the fact that HGW chose to introduce “party-passes” [*Feier-Ausweis*] which were issued via its payroll offices, restricting access to its own workers.<sup>655</sup>

Inevitably, such “joyful” leisure organized for workers by KdF during the war

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<sup>653</sup> See LA Berlin A Rep. 231 /431, Bd.2.

<sup>654</sup> Osram Factory Sports appears to have continued, too; at least, there are document about sports days during the war years, for example a “Summer Sports Day” [*Sommersporttag*] in 1940 and 1941, and a “Forest Run” [*Waldlauf der Betriebe*] and “Spring run” [*Frühjahrslauf*] in 1940 and 1941 respectively; see LA Berlin A Rep. 231 431, Bd. 1 and LA Berlin A 231/ 427, Bd.1.

<sup>655</sup> Generally, according to Wysocky, “only German workers and employees, foreign workers and employees from allied countries and those ‘well-proven in employment of labor’ from occupied countries were permitted” access to, apparently popular, leisure performances. [On KdF's including foreign workers in its activities, see p. 321 f. below.] These performances thus became, in this case, a tool of social control over workers. According to Wysocki, KdF's justification for “the preferential treatment of German workers and employees” was that “joyful participation of the German[s] [was] a fundamental requirement for the smooth carrying out the armament production.” [Gerd Wysocki, *Arbeit für den Krieg: Herrschaftsmechanismen in der Rüstungsindustrie des “Dritten Reiches”: Arbeitseinsatz, Sozialpolitik und staatspolizeiliche Repression bei den Reichswerken Hermann* (Braunschweig: Steinweg-Verlag, 1992), 280.]

also included sports activities. Letters by Reich Sports Leader Hans von Tschammer und Osten to former employees and sport instructors, who were now soldiers at the front, illustrate how sports remained part of Germans everyday life in wartime Berlin. He writes that the *Reichssportfeld* in Berlin (the sports and recreational area around the 1936 Berlin Olympic Stadium) has “in these magnificent summer days [of the year 1940] [...] turned into a paradise for Berliners who seek here strength and relaxation in their free time.” On the evenings of all weekdays, von Tschammer und Osten happily describes how, “old and young, thick and thin are doing sports on all fields, on all tracks and in the pools [...] It is hard to believe that it’s war when one sees this.”<sup>656</sup> (Leisurely) Sports thus continued throughout the war; von Tschammer und Osten’s words can be read as confirmation that KdF’s campaign for happiness on the German home front, which included the effort to have people do sports, was successful.

Success was also represented by the number of Factory Sports Communities, which grew from 14,000 at the end of 1938 to 21,000 in 1941. Factory Sports Days, too, were continued in the war years,<sup>657</sup> at times, they even saw higher participation numbers than in the prewar years.<sup>658</sup> However, this positive image is slightly altered when looked

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<sup>656</sup> Sportmuseum, Nachlass Wetzel, Nr. 32-75.

<sup>657</sup> In fact (and as also discussed later in this chapter), KdF Factory Sports was (officially) one of the most long lived activities of the leisure organization. Even after other cultural activities had ceased following a DAF order in 1944, KdF Factory Sports was still allowed to continue, although the decree stipulated that Factory Sports was only permitted to take place after work hours and exclusively to be led by unsalaried sports teachers. [See Wolfhard Buchholz, “Die nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft ‘Kraft durch Freude’ : Freizeitgestaltung und Arbeiterschaft im Dritten Reich” (Dissertation, Ludwig Maximilian University, 1976), 355f.]

<sup>658</sup> In 1941, the spring run for German factory workers [*Frühjahrslauf der Betriebe*] had 1,618,620 participants from 14,122 companies, meaning a 131% increase of participants and a 135% increase of involved companies. Over 2.5 million workers participated in the 1941 summer sports day [*Sommersporttag der Betriebe*.] (Lafferentz, *KdF im Kriegsjahr 1941*.) There was also increased interest in the Sports Department’s open classes, i.e. those offered by KdF outside the framework of factories, which usually did not require regular attendance, and could be joined any time. Courses such as “Happy

at more closely “on the ground,” for example, the case of Hermann-Göring-Werke [HGW.] Factory Sports for workers continued within the HGW during the war, at least for its Berlin employees;<sup>659</sup> sports classes met weekly at several sports fields in Berlin and HGW workers were asked to participate in special sports competitions, such as factory winter sports days (e.g. in December 1941<sup>660</sup>) or summer sports days.<sup>661</sup> However, the participation numbers of HGW workers were not always as high as KdF would have liked. In 1940, the KdF’s sports representative for Berlin complained to HGW’s Factory Sport Attendant that not one of HGW’s workers had signed up for the upcoming summer sports day, even though the announcement had been out for a while. Taking part in the event, so said the KdF functionary, should be a “self-evident duty” in times of war: “The more massive the struggle in the war, the stronger the will for life and for victory in the homeland.” In future, he informed HGW’s attendant, he expected 100% participation from workers.<sup>662</sup> Such demands demonstrate that, while KdF sports for workers was officially a purely voluntary activity, this was not always practically the case. The expectations of a higher-ranked KdF functionary might very well have led to a

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Gymnastics,” swimming, canoeing, tennis, horse riding and preparation courses for the *Reichsportabzeichen* were among the most popular. There were also new KdF classes for toddlers and their mothers. (See Lafferentz, *KdF im Kriegsjahr 1941*, 30.) With these activities, KdF catered towards the changed demographic during the war: the population in Germany was now predominantly female, while many of the young mothers participating in KdF classes would have been (temporarily, at least) *de facto* single-mothers – KdF classes which also included their toddlers, would have given them the chance both for physical exercise and some relaxation KdF’s emphasis on toddlers also had to do with the regime’s giving high importance to the German youth and their upbringing.

<sup>659</sup> Cf. NWA 2 Nr. 9921 and 9922.

<sup>660</sup> See NWA 2 Nr. 9921; letter by the KdF, Gau office Berlin from Dec. 10, 1941 to all shop stewards.

<sup>661</sup> For example, there was a summer sports day in August 1940; see NWA 2 Nr. 9921; letter by KdF’s Sports Department in Berlin from Aug. 14, 1940 to HGW’s Factory Sport Attendant.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

factory sports attendant exerting (more or less) pressure on “his” workers. On a broader level, we can see here that KdF’s “joy production,” while continuing throughout the war, assumed a more ‘coercive’ tone; as we will encounter later, there seems to be a new urgency on the side of KdF organizers to demand a “willingness to be joyful” from Germans.

Another, more practical change the war brought was that it increasingly caused logistical problems for Factory Sports activities. For example, in September 1943 a sports meeting for the *Hermann-Göring-Werke* could not take place, since the venue, a sports field in Berlin’s district Charlottenburg, had been damaged the night before in an Allied bombing, leaving the field unusable.<sup>663</sup> Equally, the war made finding appropriate indoor sports facilities difficult for HGW’s Factory Sports Community in Berlin. Already in January 1940, its factory sports attendant felt the need to rejoice that: “We have a sports hall! It cost us a lot of effort until this came finally true, because several gyms, which we were to have ‘as sure as death,’ were transformed very recently into barracks rooms.”<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> See NWA 2 Nr. 9921; letter to the Reich Sports Department, Administration of Reich Sports Field from Sep. 13, 1943. Similarly, in 1941, a letter about an upcoming bowling competition for HGW workers mentions that the event was being postponed given ongoing threats of Allied bombing (see NWA 2 Nr. 9922; letter by Schwalbe, Factory Sport Attendant.) HGW’s sport attendant in Berlin also reported in January 1942 that “factory sports had taken a back seat given the strong demands upon the workforce,” due to the fact that HGW was involved in the armament industry (see NWA 2 Nr. 9921, letter by HGW’s Factory Sports Attendant to German Labor Front, *Gau* Sports Department Berlin from Jan. 6, 1942.) A similar concern is raised in a 1940 letter by Dr. Heinrich Kirchhoff, head of Brandenburg’s section of the German Alpine Club, to *Reichssportführer* Hans von Tschammer und Osten. In his letter, Kirchhoff asks for permission to use the *Reichssportfeld* in Berlin after 8pm, arguing that “now in times of war, most comrades [*Kameraden und Kameradinnen*] are strained more than usual at their workplaces” and that for “many of them a visit of the *Reichssportfeld* is only possible after 7pm. These, especially, are in need of relaxation and recreation through sports.” If the sports field is already closed at 7.40, Kirchhoff’s argues, “driving out to the *Reichssportfeld* is not worthwhile anymore for those whose jobs put quite a strain on them.” (See *ibid.*; letter by Dr. Heinrich Kirchhoff to von Tschammer und Osten from May 29, 1940.)

<sup>664</sup> NWA 2 Nr. 9922; letter by Schwalbe, Factory Sport Attendant from Oct. 19, 1940. Schwalbe also asked HGW workers to help black out the windows of the newly-found gym (against bombers) at the start of sports classes.

But such practical difficulties are inevitable during a war. More interesting is the fact of KdF's visible persistence here.

In chapter three of this dissertation, I described how during peace times, KdF wanted to motivate as many workers as possible to do sports rather than focusing on the achievement of individual record sports performances. This goal was sustained throughout the war. KdF also abided by its ambition to entertain Germans through sports activities. This is exemplified by KdF's 1942 "Winter Sports Day for Companies;" the event included hiking and Bavarian curling, but also "Snowman Building" and a scavenger hunt. In fact, physical exercise was hardly at the center of this "Sports Day": "Coffee and Cake, [at some companies] stew meals with nourishing sides, and subsequent comradeship evenings with a prepared or improvised entertainment program – all this made the Winter Sports Day a pleasant experience."<sup>665</sup>

My foregoing analysis of KdF Factory Sports and its activities for German workers in factories in the realm of cultural events has shown that KdF's work in these areas continued and that it retained its focus on "joy production," mainly through light entertainment. It has also highlighted how the organizations' activities were affected by

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<sup>665</sup> *Wintersporttag der Betriebe 1942 ein großer Erfolg : Erfahrungsbericht des Sportamtes der NSG "Kraft durch Freude"*. (Berlin, 1942), 3. Almost 300,000 workers all over Germany took part in this event, and "in general the participating companies enthusiastically expressed the desire to repeat such winter sports days." KdF must also have been quite pleased to hear from these companies "that even the oldest workers [...] were actively and eagerly participating." (Ibid.) However, despite the usual emphasis on happiness and amusement, KdF (and the companies involved in actually organizing these sports days) did not forget, also as usual, to be pragmatic and cost-effective: "In several districts, a special competition in shoveling snow formed a part of the winter sports day. Since it seemed to have received the applause of many, this will be continued and used for the benefit of winter traffic. (Ibid., 4.) It seems likely it was more the utility of this 'sport' than its supposed positive reception that led to the incorporation of this competition into the program of a KdF Winter Sports day. However, as in peace times, we also find exercises incorporated into the Sports Day that seem to aim for a general preparation of the participants for war activities. Alongside snowman building, the KdF text also lists 'hand grenade throwing' as a winter sports day discipline. As already mentioned in chapter 3, there was no apparent conflict in offering these disciplines next to each other.



the war, and how it adapted to this. Any analysis of KdF's work in German factories that scrutinizes new "challenges" brought on by the war must also deal with forced laborers as "a new audience" for KdF. After the beginning of the war, the composition of workforces in Germany changed significantly. German companies employed foreign forced laborers in large numbers.<sup>666</sup> These foreign workers were also targeted by KdF's leisure programs. Such a development might appear paradoxical on first sight, given the general Nazi belief in the racial inferiority of these foreign workers. However, this belief in "joy giving strength" was so great – as was the need for a strong and productive workforce – that the practice of leisure activities, which had been utilized so broadly and successfully in the pre-war years for German workers, was now extended to foreign workers. In fact, such a development might not have been possible without KdF's existence and its (previous) work. KdF's work for foreign workers is evidence for the leisure organization's activities having become so much a part of Nazi Germany's *Alltag* that now also introducing these leisure activities into the labor camps was not considered a large jump.

On the following pages, I will explore in more detail the rationale behind leisure at work for foreigners – which often occurred separately from that for German workers – as put forth in decrees and regulations on the matter, and will describe the practice and content of such leisure activities.

In December 1943, for example, there was a social afternoon [*"Bunter Nachmittag"*] exclusively for workers of Osram's Eastern Worker Camp in Karlshorst, outside Berlin.<sup>667</sup> The evening's theme was "Ukrainian songs, melodies and dances."<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> On foreign workers in Nazi Germany, see Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany Under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>667</sup> This event in Karlshorst was arranged for Osram by KdF's parent organization, the German Labor

Here, we can see that the DAF was indeed interested in entertaining foreign workers: it offered them something from ‘their’ culture rather than attempting to instrumentalize the sphere of leisure to make points about German culture and its alleged superiority.

Leisure activities offered exclusively to foreign workers also occurred in Berlin’s Borsig Company. A leisure time event from October 1944 is documented with several photographs in a photo album from that period (see below.) The event took place at a camp for workers from the East near the train station Tegel (i.e. also near Borsig’s factories.) At first sight, the pictures markedly resemble those of KdF events for German workers. The first shows a musician, possibly a foreign worker, playing a guitar on a stage, while an audience of men, who appear to be rather well-dressed, look on. A second photograph displays a man in a Nazi uniform giving a speech on a lectern decorated with the symbol of the German Labor Front, while a young man with an accordion, probably a foreigner, who has just performed or is about to do so, sits next to the same guitar player and looks directly into the camera.<sup>669</sup> A third photograph displays a group of young women, most likely female workers from the East (“*Ostarbeiterinnen*”) who appear to have received an award. Some of the women are smiling, while others look tense, which might be due to the stress of an award ceremony. Some of them wear what look like traditional costumes. This again shows that the DAF was concerned to allow foreign workers to express themselves according to their own traditions and cultures. In other

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Front.

<sup>668</sup> LA Berlin, A Rep. 231 665.

<sup>669</sup> A photograph of a cabaret event in the leisure time hall of a labor camp 6 in Watenstedt as reproduced in Wysocki’s book is strikingly similar to the photograph from the Borsig company shown here. The Watenstedt photo also captures a stage decorated with a swastika flag; in front of an audience of workers a piano player accompanies a person (smiling or singing) on center stage (either a woman, or a man in a woman’s dress; the picture is blurry and hard to make out). (See Wysocki, *Arbeit für den Krieg*, 280.)

words, these leisure events were less concerned with political education or demonstrating German superiority, but were more interested in achieving relaxation and cheerfulness, even for foreign workers.



#### Entertainment for Foreign Workers:

Fig. 6.2 and Fig. 6.3 Leisure time event at Labor Camp, Borsig, October 1944. The caption under the left photographs indicates that this leisure event took place on the occasion of an award ceremony for a camp competition run by the administration of the Gau Berlin. I do not have further evidence to explain the character of this competition; it is unclear whether the guitarist and accordionist (in the next picture) were part of this competition or whether they were merely the entertainers of this event and that the competition itself was rather concerned with the organization, performance and cleanliness of the camp. The second picture (right) displays a Nazi (DAF?) functionary giving a speech to the audience, which probably consisted of foreign workers. The sign on his lectern (a swastika in a cog wheel, the DAF symbol) identifies this event as one organized by the German Labor Front, as it is also described in the German caption of this photograph.) On the table in front of the speaker we can see an array of prizes and, although it is different to make out in this small reproduction, some flowers, probably to be given to female awardees. (DTMB, VI E 241, "Lagerbauten Borsig.")



#### Leisure Event for Foreign Workers :

Fig. 6.4 (left) Female Workers, possibly *Ostarbeiterinnen* at Leisure Time Event, Labor Camp, Borsig, October 1944.

Note that some of these women appear to be wearing traditional costumes, suggesting that they might have performed traditional dances at this 1944 event at a labor camp of the Borsig company in Berlin. (DTMB Museum, VI E 241, "Lagerbauten Borsig".)

In a 1943 DAF circular, Fritz Sauckel, the General Plenipotentiary for Labor Deployment, explained the rationale behind such leisure activities for foreign workers, arguing that “the right accommodation, meals, treatment and care” was “of decisive importance” when trying to elicit top performance from the deployment of Eastern workers (“*Ostarbeiter*.”) For this, “companies should take the strongest initiative and be fully conscious of their responsibility;” this would include offering appropriate leisure activities for these workers. Sauckel wrote that “several companies [...] repeatedly reported that the expansions of appropriate caretaking operations have led to a substantial increase of performance,” but that many other companies still had to catch up in this area.<sup>670</sup>

One of the addressees of Sauckel’s circular by Sauckel was the then newly-founded *Hermann-Göring-Werke* in Salzgitter, Lower Saxony. A number of HGW’s labor camps became the site of leisure events in 1940.<sup>671</sup> The activities there ranged from social evenings to movies, concerts, cabaret shows, soccer games and gymnastic shows. Clearly, some of these events were directly targeted at foreign workers, including Czechs: some of the movies were screened in the Czech language, and there was also an event called *Tschechen-Konzert* [Czech concert,] which presumably referred to a performance of Czech music, maybe also by Czech musicians.<sup>672</sup> Again, we can see a tendency to

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<sup>670</sup> NWA 2 Nr. 11504 Fritz Sauckel, “Anlage zu Rundschreiben Nr. 4455,” Apr. 30, 1943.

<sup>671</sup> For some camps, there were up to seven events during this one month; the minimum of events was two.

<sup>672</sup> In later months (March and April, 1940), there were in addition movies in Italian, for Italian workers employed by the HGW. Similarly, Maas mentions newspaper coverage in Nuremberg of KdF leisure events for French, Walloon and Czech workers; overall, the 367 cultural events for foreign workers in Franconia were reported, and 502 events in labor camps. Maas, however, seems to doubt these numbers, since he could not find any evidence for these events beyond the newspaper articles. He also wonders whether

make the events more accessible (and possibly enjoyable) for the foreign workers, rather than an insistence on using the performances for educating them about German language and culture.

In 1943, HGW also received an announcement decreed by the *Wehrmacht* about new regulations regarding the employment of Soviet POWs in 1943. Curiously, here, too, we can see the rootedness of the concept of “education to happiness” – while at the same time, the text clearly identifies Russian POWs as primitive:

For these POWS, too, ways and means must be found for their “mental attendance” [“*Seelische Betreuung*”] – even the most primitive Russian has this need –; [in order] to educate him from an obtuse forced laborer, who was ruled via a knout, into a happy person again, [he must be given] so much stimulation that he does not vegetate in his free time. At all events, there should be a common room available for the Russians where they can gather to [...] play in a band, sing, read newspapers, organize games etc. This will bring open gazes and happy faces to the POWs in the camp, and will educate the people about the difference between Jewish-Bolshevik and German treatment. Later, they will [provide] the best propaganda in Russia for Germany and the German character. [NWA 2 Nr. 10562; “Arbeitseinsatz, Einsatz sowjetrussischer Kriegsgefangener,” *Mitteilung für die Mitglieder der Wirtschaftsgruppe Steine und Erde*, 4/1943.]

This letter shows that not only productivity, but also Germany’s reputation abroad was considered important and in need of improvement via leisure activities. Of course, knowing about the inhumane treatment of forced laborers and POWs by Germans during World War II, this letter could be simply be dismissed as cynical, or at least disregarded

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“leisure time organization by KdF could offer really some relaxation to often poorly treated foreign workers” (Maass, *Freizeitgestaltung und kulturelles Leben in Nürnberg 1930-1945*, 334.) While I tend to agree with him on this second point, I would be less skeptical about the reality of KdF events for foreign workers, given that there are sources about this from several places (even if the newspaper articles among them are probably slightly exaggerated.). Andrea Wekenborg, for example, discusses KdF events for forced laborers in Berlin and Brandenburg; cf. Andrea Wekenborg, “Lagerleben und Hierarchien in Anweisungen und Erlassen: Die Pragmatik der Reglementierung ausländischer Arbeitskräfte,” in *Arbeiten für den Feind: Zwangsarbeiter-Alltag in Berlin und Brandenburg (1939-1945)*, ed. Leonore Scholze-Irrlitz and Karoline Noack (Berlin: be.bra-Verlag, 1998). Baranowski also discusses KdF’s work for foreign workers; she says it was undertaken “halfheartedly” and points out that “foreigners received short shrift. [...] KdF entertained foreign workers separately and belatedly, usually providing them with foreign entertainers, thus undermining KdF’s claim that the solicitude shown to foreign workers would expose them to German culture.” (Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, 215f.)

as an exception which was not realized. However, one should still take seriously its existence and the mindset behind it (even if it was cynical). The German approach of “producing joy” is here strongly contraposed to the so-called “Jewish-Bolshevik” way of ruling. Where Germans are concerned with making workers happy, so the claim, the Russians use a knout.

Overall, KdF’s entertainment of foreign workers is grounded in its goal to increase their performance through its ‘joy production.’ A 1944 DAF test justified KdF’s work for foreigners as follows: “Everywhere where German and foreign workers [“*Kräfte*”] are at work contributing to the ultimate victory [*Endsieg*,] KdF is willing to provide the necessary compensation for their tireless producing.”<sup>673</sup> The emphasis on the general goal – contributing to Germany’s *Endsieg* – is less surprising than the means DAF and KdF were willing to employ. The so-often celebrated “joy-giving” was consciously not limited to Germans, but extended also to foreigners working for the Germans.<sup>674</sup> This is highly curious in light of Nazi ideology based on tenets of German superiority. However, it seems this was no great concern for KdF. It was willing to make ‘inferior’ foreigners ‘happy’ if this would boost their productivity and help the German cause.<sup>675</sup> Of course, all this was certainly ‘cynical,’ as many, if not all, foreign workers

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<sup>673</sup> BArch NS 9/160; exact date not given.

<sup>674</sup> It is important to note that KdF’s work for foreign workers also occurred in occupied countries – the statement cited also refers to these activities. One such instance was occupied Belgium, where “events in the factories for German and native workers [were] successfully conducted” in 1944 by the leisure organization. (See BArch NS 9/160; exact date not given.) In Brussels, highly-popular KdF vaudeville evenings were held every Saturday and Sunday. The source suggests KdF events were not limited to the Belgian capital; there were offerings in Lüttich, too, such as one at an armament factory mentioned in a text from February 2, 1944. These KdF texts about Belgium promised more such events, emphasizing that its “troupes are eagerly awaited and the performances are received with joy and thus give inner relaxation to the man who works night and day.” (BArch NS 9/ 160, pag. 241.)

<sup>675</sup> Generally this tension recalls the dual roles of concentration camps as ‘work camps’ and ‘extermination

had not actually chosen to help the Germans, but rather were forced to do so. KdF either simply ignored this, or, more likely – and more tellingly – believed that it did not matter for its project. In other words, KdF’s belief in its own work and its effects was so total that KdF functionaries were convinced that ‘joy-production’ would work in any case, even if ‘applied’ to non-willing participants.<sup>676</sup>

In my section on KdF’s wartime activities in German factories, I have pointed to how this work was affected by the war, and which adaptations KdF accordingly undertook. Such developments can also be seen looking more globally at KdF’s wartime work for the German civilian population. Consider, for example, a new event series, called “KdF on Sunday Mornings” [*KdF am Sonntag Vormittag*,”] launched in May 1944. The target audiences for these gratis events were predominantly “soldiers, the evacuated or the bombed out, and [workers].” These Sunday morning KdF events were a reaction to the increased working hours of the war, which had made it impossible for many workers to attend weekday events, all the more so as these had often began significantly earlier because of the war.<sup>677</sup> This new initiative, under the aegis of KdF’s Leisure Time Department was to start by staging Sunday events in all larger cities at least once a month. The performances would be free and would help “bring edification and

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camps’ and the tensions inherent in the notion of “extermination through work.” (See for example, Ulrich Herbert, “Arbeit und Vernichtung. Ökonomisches Interesse und Primat der “Weltanschauung im Nationalsozialismus,” in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zur Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt a.M., 1987), 198-236; also, section 4, “Arbeit in den Konzentrationslagern” Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann, eds., *Die Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), 553–751.)

<sup>676</sup> Of course, it would work even more effectively if such contributions were willing; and accordingly, as I argue in this chapter, KdF very much demanded from its German audiences such ‘disposition.’ “One Must Be Able to Enjoy Oneself” seems to have been KdF’s ‘mantra’ for its wartime work in Germany when it came to the entertainment of German workers. [See page 329.]

<sup>677</sup> BArch R 36/2363; memo from May 8, 1944.

strength in a generous manner to those people's comrades, who at this moment of global reversal [*Weltenwende*] seek and struggle for a new internal foothold.”<sup>678</sup> We can draw two general conclusions from the establishment of this new leisure series in 1944. First, it shows us that KdF continued to be active as a cultural organizer during the war, even in the fifth year of fighting. Indeed, not only was KdF carrying on, but also implementing new plans. Second, we can see how KdF operated in a very adaptive manner: the organization worked hard to make leisure events fit to the new demands made by the war.



#### KdF events during the War:

Fig. 6.5 and 6.6, announcements for KdF events in 1943. The poster on the left is an invitation to “Cheerfulness in Spring,” a “social evening with cheerful vaudeville, music, singing, dance, humor and artistry”; while the one on the right, for a “master evenings of cheerful entertainment,” almost admonishingly exclaims “One just must be able to enjoy oneself.” Both posters are created by and for the KdF office in the district of Münster-Warendorf in North-West Germany. (Kuropka, *Meldungen aus Münster*, 239-240.)

Despite some transformations, however, KdF remained set on its main orientation: providing “joy production” and filling the everyday lives of Germans on

the home front with light entertainment and distracting amusement. Wartime announcements for KdF events reflect this; two such examples, both from a district in Germany’s North-West are reproduced above.<sup>679</sup> The first poster, from May 1943, is

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.; KdF circular from the Leisure Department’s Reich office to all KdF *Gau* offices from March 20, 1944.

<sup>679</sup> Both posters are from the district Münster-Warendorf.



about a *Bunter Abend* entitled “*Frohsinn im Frühling*.” [“Cheerfulness in the Spring.”] The evening was to be a “cheerful cabaret” with music, singing, humor and acrobatics as well as two female clowns performing during the event [“2 *Clownessas*.”] The second event, from April 1943, was advertised as a “*Meisterabend froher Unterhaltung*” [“masterful evening of joyful entertainment”] and had a somewhat defiant sounding title: “*Man muss sich nur freuen können*.” [“One just must be able to enjoy oneself.”] The title implies that happiness, or rather having the capacity for happiness, was considered every Germans’ duty. In other words, Germans had to be willing to be entertained (and to be made ‘happy’) – and then the rest would be taken care of by KdF. Once such amusement and happiness was “activated,” neither Germans nor Germany had reason to be concerned. As long as Germany’s population was (able to be) happy, the message suggests, there was no reason to doubt a glorious German future, including victory in the war. In this sense, a willingness “to be happy” emerges as a *leitmotiv*, and as a demand from KdF and the Nazi regime made of every German.

We can also see this in the following song, called “Laughing is healthy,” by comedian Udo Vietz, one of the many entertainers who performed for KdF during World War II:

Laughing is healthy – hohohohoho! / Thus open your mouth – hihihihhi!  
 Always for a hearty laughter – jahahahah! / Even if you are not well –  
 hohohohoho!  
 Laugh in spite of it – hehehehehe! / Otherwise you will certainly be much, much  
 worse.  
 Always laughing, always amused / Laugh into your enemy’s eye, then you have  
 won!  
 If you are always laughing hohohohoho! / Whatever you do – hihihihhi!  
 Then you will find true luck on earth. / Hahahaha!

You may laugh [about this, but] with laughter, / You can make the impossible  
 possible. [...]  
 So, I can give you this advice / Acquire laughter for yourself  
 Then nobody can spoil it for you / Then nothing can annoy you anymore [...]

[Udo Vietz, “Lachen ist gesund;” quoted after Volker Kühn, *Deutschlands Erwachen: Kabarett unterm Hakenkreuz 1933-1945* (Weinheim: Quadriga, 1989), 217.]

Of course, the song’s overall sentiment of “Laughing is healthy” is quite close to the leisure organization’s “Strength-through-Joy” agenda. But the song includes the notion just discussed: the German population was *asked* to be happy, to set about “acquir[ing] laughter,” so that it could successfully face the particular challenges posed by the war. In other words, there was a requirement for Germans to be generally willing to be cheerful and “entertain-able.” The war meant an increased demand for happiness, health and strength. KdF was to be the supplier of this – and the population had to step up and play the part of willing receiver. One could speculate that what the war brought about here is an escalation of KdF’s “joy production” that now led to its externalization. KdF was doing all what it could to entertain Germans, but for the final realization of this happiness for Germans, their own willingness was necessary. So too was victory in the war, of course, but this was itself contingent on Germans being happy.

That KdF busily did its share – or even more – to fulfill its own agenda of “joy production” will be even clearer from an analysis of the organization’s reception, which contained a lot of criticism of exactly this approach. Before discussing this more closely however, it is important to explore one more segment of KdF’s work that continued throughout most of the war: its educational work. This was done through the *Deutsches Volksbildungswerk* [Institute for the Education of the German People]<sup>680</sup> and was based on the claim that, in times of war, it would be especially important not to let the “torch of education” for adults go out, “in particular during a battle that is, like this one,

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<sup>680</sup> After 1943, however, the Institute was made independent of KdF, and became an immediate department of the German Labor Front.

ideologically contingent.” Ongoing educational offerings were considered crucial because of the strength they would produce for the entire German population. The *Volksbildungswerk*’s propaganda described the war as a defensive strike against a “giant onslaught by a deficit of culture [*Ansturm der Kulturlosigkeit*,]” directed “against Germany and Europe overall.” In other words, World War II was also conceived as a clash taking place because of and through culture. In this context, the *Volksbildungswerk* wanted to prepare the German population for the struggle by offering educational activities. Only such an intervention would avert “a victory of those masses and powers lacking culture, and thus the downfall of our people and the destruction of centuries-old European culture” a triumph of “the cynical antics of Jewish materialism.”<sup>681</sup> Driven by this self-perception of its existential rationale – and in “in order to participate in the mental-spiritual [*seelisch-geistig*] mobilization of the nation’s resisting powers,”<sup>682</sup> the *Volksbildungswerk* in fact even intensified its work after the outbreak of World War II. In 1943/1944, there were 18 million participants in events organized by the *Volksbildungswerk*.<sup>683</sup> Most of its wartime work consisted of lectures and recitals by

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<sup>681</sup> Heinrich Schulz, “Erwachsenenbildung im Kriege: Die Fackel, die nie erlischt,” *Arbeitertum*, Jul 15, 1944, 3-4.

<sup>682</sup> BArch NS 15/ 32, pag. 72; Alexander Sangiorgio, “Das Neue Arbeitsjahr: Erwachsenenbildung im Kriege. Wehrgedanke-Neue Aufgaben-Zielbewusste Weiterarbeit,” *Monatsblätter für Volksbildungswerk*. To do so, the Institute established a work group called “Well-Fortified People” [*Wehrhaftes Volk*], which organized lectures on the “defense-political situation in Germany” and courses on using compasses and maps with hikes to practice the newly-acquired knowledge. A 1940 brochure about the work in the Bayrisch Ostmark *Gau* confirms Schulz’s assessment of *Volksbildungswerk* program changes; according to the brochure, the *Volksbildungswerk*’s lectures were now predominantly about “contemporary political and defense-political topics.” (Backert, *Feierabend und Freizeit im Kriege*, 18.). In addition, the Institute’s work now also included educational lectures for German soldiers and events and activities for those wounded soldiers stationed in military hospitals. For the latter group, the institute began establishing libraries and founding “Handicraft Rooms” [*Bastelstuben*], where wounded soldiers could do leisure craftwork of various kinds.

<sup>683</sup> This number, based on the Institute’s own statistics, did not include the additional “intellectual-cultural care-taking” of soldiers and persons victimized by bombing attacks, nor the cultural activities for foreign

poets (overall, 26,663 events with over 5 million participants in 1943/1944.) In addition, the Institute organized the screening of culture films and set up work groups and work circles (on historico-political topics, but also on, for example, photography or music.)<sup>684</sup>

The German population “appreciated that the work of the Institute for the Education of the People during the war adapted so quickly to the changed cultural and political situation and to the altered interest of broad circles of the German people.”<sup>685</sup>

Such a change of interest, for example, occurred in Hamburg; here, more people attended lectures about “questions of genetics and national health,” as well as those dealing with foreign affairs.<sup>686</sup> This shift in concerns can be read as representing increased interest and support towards Nazi ideology. However, there is also evidence that not all of Germany was “in line” and indeed some events, which were very openly committed to Nazi ideology, were actually popular for quite different, “non-Nazi,” reasons. An example is a lecture by a musicologist called Max Merz, organized by the Munich *Volksbildungswerk*, and entitled “The Jazz Drug” [“*Rauschgift Jazz*.”] Despite the fact that this lecture should have treated Jazz music negatively, in accordance with both Nazism’s Anti-Americanism and disdain for modern (and ‘black’) music, “a large number of young people” showed up and “openly proclaimed their sympathy for Jazz and Swing.” The lecture backfired more completely when “the speaker moreover failed, and reached with his statements

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workers.

<sup>684</sup> Heinrich Schulz, “Erwachsenenbildung im Kriege: Die Fackel, die nie erlischt,” *Arbeitertum*, Jul 15, 1944, 3-4.

<sup>685</sup> BArch NS 18/948, pag 1; “Auszugsweise Abschrift aus dem Bericht des Reichsführers SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei Nr. 131 vom 10.10. 1940.”

<sup>686</sup> Events centered on economic questions, on the other hand, now had fewer participants; *see ibid.*, pag 1f.

exactly the opposite of that what was aimed for.”<sup>687</sup> It looks as if here an event by the Institute for the Education of the German People was (ab)used by young Germans who certainly had tastes that deviated from the Nazi mainstream and who may even have been opposed to Nazi ideology.<sup>688</sup>

This incident is particularly interesting as a lesson for historians seeking to gauge the popularity of events described in historical sources. Obviously, this case shows us that it would be wrong to see high participation numbers for KdF events as always indicative of a ‘success’ for the leisure organization or as ‘a victory’ for Nazi ideology. This case (which recollects similar occurrences in the realm of KdF sports, as described in chapter three) shows that it is also important to consider what the audience ‘made of’ these events, in other words, in what manner they received them. Unfortunately, evidence on this side of things is very sparse.

Overall, many aspects of the wartime work of the *Volksbildungswerk* exemplify what we can say about KdF more generally in this period. First, there is an increase in activities. Second, we clearly see how the Institute presented its activities as an important contribution to the German war effort, and that in fact the war is also fought for the sake of concerns related to the organization and its departments: “happiness” for KdF overall, the continuous existence of German culture for the *Volksbildungswerk* in particular. The Institute’s offerings did not correspond to KdF’s overall goal of “joy production” and

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid., pag 1.

<sup>688</sup> Both Swing and Jazz were considered “degenerate art” by the Nazi authorities, mainly because a majority of Jazz and Swing musicians were black or, to a lesser extent, Jewish. But against the regime’s official stance, Germany in the mid-1930s saw the development of a youth counter-culture which defined itself through listening to Jazz and Swing; see Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 166.

rather could quite easily be characterized as helping political and ideological dissemination, an exercise that KdF, was not really involved in. Some of this discrepancy may be rooted in the fact that the *Volksbildungswerk* became an independent entity in 1943, and thus ceased being a branch of KdF. But of course, the institute had already had a distinct political disposition in earlier years – it always had been the most ‘political’ arm of KdF, and so also the most removed from the overall goal of producing joy through amusement and entertainment. However, it is important in this context to consider again the case of the backfiring jazz lecture organized by the *Volksbildungswerk*. In cases such as this one the Institute’s events might have been embraced despite (and not because of) their more ideological outlook. This could then speak to KdF’s general procedure of omitting obvious ideological content, so as not to scare off audiences, having had some merit (though KdF might even have been too careful.)

For an analysis of KdF’s wartime work, the SD, the SS’s Security Service, provides a useful source base. The SD constantly monitored the civilian population’s reactions to KdF events.<sup>689</sup> My examination of the resulting reports will show that overall KdF stuck to light, entertaining events. This “joy production” was often quite harshly criticized for containing “tasteless” elements and inappropriate jokes. In other words, the reports on KdF events for civilians show that these events faced similar reactions to those I have already described for the organization’s activities in the realm of troop entertainment; and similarly here, such criticisms did not lead to much alteration in KdF programs.

The SD’s evaluation of KdF’s work emphasizes “how gratefully the population

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<sup>689</sup> This was recorded in the “*Meldungen aus dem Reich*,” reports about (political) trends and the morale in Germany.

receives the large scale operation of KdF's cultural operations in the war." However, in its reports we also meet increasing criticism of vaudeville events, which were often dismissed as being as too obscene. A report from Thuringia, for example, called the KdF event "*Liebe ist Trumpf*" ["Love is Trumps"] a great disappointment and its humor "raunchy and entirely inappropriate for the youth." A "*Meisterabend froher Unterhaltung*" ["Masterly Evening of Happy Entertainment"] in Danzig was strongly criticized for its "dancer performing almost naked." An observer of KdF vaudeville evenings in rural areas near Chemnitz, Saxony, commented on their "tasteless erotic jokes" and demanded that such events "whose entertainment only consists of steamy salaciousness are to disappear."<sup>690</sup> Most complaints in regards to KdF vaudeville events circled around dirty jokes.<sup>691</sup> Overall, the population's criticism was appreciated by observers such as those from the SD, who saw it as a good sign that, "despite an often discernible hunger for events, the attendees with a working class background, too, receive these events very critically and measure them, on the basis of the programmatic pronouncements of Dr. Ley, again and again, against National Socialist cultural demands

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<sup>690</sup> SD-report from Dec. 2, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 1825.

<sup>691</sup> In Leipzig, for example female workers left a KdF event because of inappropriate jokes made by the emcee. In addition, audiences also criticized political jokes that were considered inappropriate. For example, in Ried in Austria, the presenter of a vaudeville evening, performed by the ensemble of the *Reichstheaterzug* II [KdF/DAF's mobile theater Nr. II,] recited a poem called "*Der Völkerbund*" [League of Nations]. While speaking, he impersonated in voice and gesture both the Italian leader Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. SD reports that described such occurrences demanded that KdF performers restrain from this kind of joking. (BArch R 58/149, pag. 165; overall, the SD-report from March 8, 1940 lists criticism from Potsdam, Bremen, Linz, Bayreuth, Liegnitz, Frankfurt, Bielefeld, Aachen and Karlsbad.) Other KdF performances, however, were better received. They were considered more decent and very much embraced by people all over the country. I have omitted here several reports of events that were liked by audiences in various German cities and rural areas. Audiences sometimes differentiated between aspects *within* one event: in Dessau, a KdF event called "*Fidel und Munter*" ["Merry and Jolly"] was gratefully received, but another "half-naked dancer [was] dismissed as 'rude and offensive.'" (SD-report from Dec. 2, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 1824-5. Similar criticism had also been listed in the SD report from Mar. 27, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 918ff.)

[and a general] National Socialist attitude.”<sup>692</sup> Seen from a different perspective, all these reports about “tasteless” and “dirty jokes” can be read as evidence that KdF predominantly offered light, amusing, silly and ‘fun-centered’ entertainment. In other words, the reports can be considered evidence that KdF did indeed act on its commitment to provide easy amusement, even if it was considered by some as either silly or distasteful.

Not all audiences, however, were critical towards what KdF had to offer to them. In 1940, the SD concluded on the basis of several dispatches it had received: “workers, subject to long and exhausting work hours, have little interest in following events of cultural value. It can be witnessed that purely entertaining events, such as operettas, circus and vaudeville find more approval than serious theater performances.”<sup>693</sup> Where the “joy” component was less predominant, there was worry about KdF’s impact: some SD observers complained that KdF’s “propagandistic effect” might be weakened because the leisure organization had arranged events “whose level exceeded the degree of education and comprehension of the workers.”<sup>694</sup>

Overall, there was a certain degree of ambivalence on the parts of SD observers when it came to the ‘success’ and popularity of KdF events. Many do frequently address how popular KdF was with its activities, giving the leisure organization’s focus on “light entertainment” credit for this. For example, in June 1940 the SD recorded “from all regions of the *Reich*, in particular from central and western Germany [the] strong desire

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<sup>692</sup> SD report from Dec. 2, 1940, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 1826.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid.



of broad circles of the populations for cultural events, which in the best sense of the word were suitable to ‘entertain’ and to ‘relax’” and that KdF was successful in meeting this demand, to the great appreciation of the population, “especially the rural one.”<sup>695</sup> However, despite these frequent references to KdF’s “successes,” duly identified as rooted in the leisure organization’s ‘entertainment component,’ many SD reports remained critical of just this aspect of KdF events. So strong is this double analysis that the ambivalence is often found within the same report. For example, the just-discussed SD report confirmed the popularity of KdF entertainments but also included the following statement:

As had been reported on several earlier occasions, one can see again and again that those places where KdF offices seek more intensively to uphold an artistic level above pure entertainment [...], the targeted audiences indeed “went along,” especially those from the working population. [Ibid., 2383f.]

Further along, the report demands that KdF move beyond its focus on amusement and joy. Thus, in some respects, the SD made demands not directly connected to, and even somewhat opposed to the explicitly uttered preferences of the population, regardless of the fact that the population was quite content with “pure entertainment” and did not want much more. It admitted this itself in a 1943 report: “Overall, the light tone of the entertaining, easygoing and unproblematic performances answers the needs of most of the [...] audiences best. ‘Very difficult fare’ is rejected almost 100 percent of the time.”<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> SD-report, from Jun. 9, 1941, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*; 2383.

<sup>696</sup> SD-report, from winter 1943, quoted after Christoph Kleßmann, “Untergänge - Übergänge. Gesellschaftliche Brüche und Kontinuitätslinien vor und nach 1945,” in *Nicht nur Hitlers Krieg. Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Deutschen*, ed. Christoph Kleßmann (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1989), 95. An increasing “*Vergüngungssucht*” [“addiction to joy”] that grew proportionally to the bombing of German cities was also described by historian Ulrich Heinemann; see Ulrich Heinemann, “Krieg und Frieden an der ‘inneren Front’. Normalität und Zustimmung, Terror und Opposition im Dritten Reich,” in *Nicht nur Hitlers*

Criticism like this, contrasting the reactions of many of KdF's attendees, also came from representatives of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.<sup>697</sup> As had been the case for KdF's work in the entertainment of German troops, Goebbels's ministry (and often, he himself) was a regular, and at times fierce, critic of KdF's activities on the German 'home front,'<sup>698</sup> referring to it as a pure "*Rummelbewegung*" ["Mumbo Jumbo Movement."]<sup>699</sup> The ministry wanted to avoid entertainment leading to

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*Krieg. Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Deutschen*, ed. Christoph Kleßmann (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1989), 40.

<sup>697</sup> These representatives had a clear opinion about how organized leisure should look. For them, KdF's activities were vulgar and out-of-line. It apparently did not matter to them that (often large) parts of the audience were indeed entertained by these KdF events. An example of this attitude is the Ministry's assessment of a KdF social evening called "Triumph of Cheerfulness." Even though the Ministry referred to "many that liked the performances," it also made sure to add that it did not consider their judgment worthy to be taken into account. Instead, the report cites statements from the more critical members of the audience, such as: "What is the purpose of such a performance? Is the goal to destroy order and morals, which have already become loosened because of the war, even more? [...] And all this against the background of our very serious time, for a party event! (BArch NS 18/676; letter by the *Gaupropagandaamt* Schleswig-Holstein from Mar. 19, 1943.) The report suggests that the conflict about the standard of KdF's leisure events also had a rural *versus* urban component: often, complaints from rural communities would be dismissed by offices on the Reich level "as statements by 'provincial moral cowards' [*Provinz-Muckers*]." (This is especially interesting given our knowledge of KdF's special care to adapt its work to the circumstances of the countryside, rather than merely exporting its urban offerings.) The statement also hints at accrued frustration with KdF and DAF (at least if we take it that KdF and DAF are the Reich-level offices referred to; the term is unlikely to refer to the Propaganda Ministry's national offices given the phrasing of the report.)

<sup>698</sup> The memoranda of Goebbels's daily conferences with the departmental heads of his ministry provide us with examples of this Ministry's criticism of KdF, which emerged at an increasing rate throughout the war years; see BArch R 55/ 20001c; "Protokolle der täglichen Konferenzen des Reichsministers Goebbels mit den Abteilungsleitern" from Apr. 1, Apr. 11 and Jun. 15, 1940. This critical stance towards KdF by Goebbels' Ministry is of course very reminiscent of similar critiques made about the leisure organization's entertainment of German soldiers, as described in chapter 5.

<sup>699</sup> BArch R 55/ 20001c; "Protokolle der täglichen Konferenzen des Reichsministers Goebbels mit den Abteilungsleitern," here from April 1. The Ministry wanted to take care that "the emcees [at KdF events] lapse less frequently into dirty jokes than it has been the case so far." While it was permissible to proceed generously when it came to the "disrobement of female bodies," one had to be stricter with "alleged comedians." (This apparent tolerance of *deshabille* is striking, especially in the light of other texts by the ministry or the SD that complain about an excessive degree of nakedness amongst female (front) artists.) Importantly, however, the Propaganda Ministry did not have an entirely joy-hostile attitude, but instead also appreciated the benefits of entertainment. The memoranda for the conference from June 15, 1940 record a demand that the KdF theater in Jüterborg switch from "heavy, serious dramas" to "concrete plain fare," the latter probably referring to light, entertaining comedies.

a kind of “hyper-optimism” amongst Germans during the war. Instead, people should always have “real corset stays,” as it was put in the memoranda of the Ministry – it appears such a corset was required to contain KdF’s entertainment exuberance. The Ministry pushed for KdF’s incorporation into the Nazi party’s propaganda central office [*Reichspropagandaleitung*,] or at least the incorporation of those of KdF’s branches which were involved in arranging lectures and talks.<sup>700</sup> While this never happened, it is important to notice this demand as it demonstrates the ministry’s annoyance with KdF, in particular when it came to educational and explicitly political activities, such as lectures. The leisure organization was considered so incapable of providing good and productive lectures on its own that the Ministry thought lectures arranged by KdF “nonsensical and harmful.”<sup>701</sup>

Goebbels finally reacted to the recurring criticisms of KdF events for German civilians on the ‘home front.’ In his function as head of the *Reich* Culture Chamber, he issued the following decree in 1944:

Several recent incidents have shown that obvious principles of interior cleanliness were often not adhered to during vaudeville performances and when putting together the so-called social evenings [*Bunte Abende*.] This causes me to advise in all severity that it cannot be accepted that during [leisure] events [...] a sinking [...] into areas of sexual unsavoriness and vulgar and dirty jokes occurs, and that this shall be inhibited in the future by any means necessary. [Despite] cheap instant successes with certain audiences[, performers] should not [be misled into thinking] that the unspoilt broad strata of our people and in particular the healthy-thinking front soldier [will not] fiercely reject these kinds of performances. [BArch R 56 I/37; pag. 15; decree by Goebbels, reproduced in a letter from Jul. 20, 1944 to the heads of all propaganda departments.]

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<sup>700</sup> The memoranda of the Ministry’s daily meetings specify that one Herr Fischer, quite possibly Hugo Fischer, an early Nazi party member and, since 1938, head of the Nazi party Central Propaganda Office, was to officially demand this incorporation from KdF. I did not find any documents verifying that this approach took place.

<sup>701</sup> BArch R 55, 20001c; “Protokolle der täglichen Konferenzen des Reichsministers Goebbels mit den Abteilungsleitern,” from April 11.

Goebbels emphasized in the conclusion of his decree that he had no objections if “problems of more intimate character are approached [...] in front of adults” during performances, as long as it occurred in “a discreet and tasteful manner.” However, he warned those performers who violated such guidelines for a “clean and decent ethos” that they, together with the performance organizers, should be prepared to deal with the consequences and would be “held accountable.”<sup>702</sup> His decree does not specify the nature of these consequences; possible punishments are not discussed. While the practices, dimensions, effects and the chances of enforcement of this decree remain rather unclear, its existence speaks to the fact that, in 1944, the vulgarity of leisure events was (still) considered a significant problem.

The ‘low quality’ of KdF events was causally connected to the war which led to shortages of trained employees available to work for KdF. This development put in jeopardy the organization’s “systematic and especially [its] skilled cultural work”: “Those staffers in villages or district towns, who are typically the first targets of the population’s criticism, often lack the necessary interior involvement and responsibility. Often, they approach the execution of cultural events just like ‘a merchant [does] sales of his merchandise.’”<sup>703</sup>

This latter report, from the SD, puts the main blame for KdF’s “low quality” squarely on the war. Of course, the war hindered KdF’s work, and probably did not help

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<sup>702</sup> BArch R 56 I/37; pag. 15; decree by Goebbels, reproduced in a letter from Jul. 20, 1944 to the heads of all propaganda departments.

<sup>703</sup> SD-report from Dec. 1, 1941, in *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 3049. An earlier SD report, from March 1940, discussed the shortages of coal – as well as traffic limitations and the end of public transportation discounts – as war-related circumstances that negatively affected the number of participants in cultural events organized by KdF in German cities; see BArch R 58/149, pag. 164; SD-report from Mar. 8, 1940.

the standards of its performances. However, criticism of KdF's work in regards to the quality of its events had been there from almost the inception of the organization. In fact, it was probably more an outcome of its commitment to "joy production" than to any contingencies of the war. KdF's lack of reaction to all this criticism should be seen then, as I have argued before, as an expression of and loyal standing to this commitment.

So, despite facing increasingly more difficulties, KdF was committed to carrying on its work – and remained committed to bringing joy to Germans and non-Germans through amusing, light entertainments. Even when faced with Allied bombings of German cities, KdF was eager to continue its leisure events in the very midst of the attacks.<sup>704</sup> This, however, was not always received positively by the affected cities' populations.<sup>705</sup> Not surprisingly, in the days immediately after an attack, people's need for culture was "starkly decreased."<sup>706</sup> Generally, the urban population reacted negatively to news announcements about the re-opening of cinemas and theater published only a few days after an attack. An inhabitant of Berlin commented on the continuation of cultural events after allied bomb attacks of his city that:

In fact, one should expect enough circumspection to have events paused as long as it takes to bury the attacks' victims. It is impossible to believe there are still people right now who are interested in theater, opera or revue performances. [BArch R58/ 191, pag. 44; SD report from Dec. 1943.]

Other Berliners agreed with this type of criticism expressed incomprehension that anyone "in these days can visit a theater play or a vaudeville show." Those who attended cultural

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<sup>704</sup> See, for example, Maass, *Freizeitgestaltung und kulturelles Leben in Nürnberg 1930-1945*, 333. Maass describes here how KdF organized a three-hour long social evening with various vaudeville acts in the already heavily bombed city of Nuremberg.

<sup>705</sup> See BArch R58/ 191, pag. 43; SD report from Dec. 1943.

<sup>706</sup> According to the SD report, in general the population's willingness to visit cultural events would only reemerge around one and half weeks after bomb attacks. (Ibid., pag. 43f.)

events shortly after the attacks – often soldiers, transients or people without families – were called “slackers” and “impious” by many Berliners. In some cases, the audience also included people who recently had been directly affected by the bomb attacks. They visited leisure events in an attempt to find some short-term distraction, but often failed to achieve this, since they were unable to “settle into” the narrations of the cultural performance and could not reconcile their recent experiences and the illusions encountered on stage or screen.<sup>707</sup>

Some efforts by the authorities, including KdF, were directed at distracting those people affected by bomb attacks with cultural performances brought directly into bunkers or food-distributing offices.<sup>708</sup> Reactions to these efforts were positive, but with many reservations. In one instance, a musical performance in a large bunker in Berlin had to be stopped after twenty minutes, since the visitors in the bunker expressed rather unanimously “that the performances might very well have been meant in a nice way, but now enough of this.” In another instance, women in a bunker near Berlin’s Zoological Gardens demanded the immediate ending of the music after a warning about impending air bombing attacks had been issued.<sup>709</sup>

Sometimes, discussions of KdF in the context of air raids also took a more satirical form. The following parody of a KdF social evening was in circulation in the 1940s, according to a collection of jokes from the Nazi period.<sup>710</sup> The text invited readers

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<sup>707</sup> BArch R58/ 191, pag. 43; SD report from Dec. 1943.

<sup>708</sup> Ibid.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Unfortunately, the compiler of these jokes, Kurt Hirche, does not give a date for this text (although he typically does for other jokes he collected,) nor does he provide any information on where he found this

to a “basement party in the club ‘Lights Off’” with the following program:

1. Introduction: Wailing Sirens
  2. Common Song: “All the birds are already here”
  3. Welcome Address [by] Speaker Air Raid Warden
  4. March played on the home organ: “With Bombs and Grenades”
  5. Male Choir: “I sit here in the basement deep”
  6. Female Choir: “What comes from on high”
  7. Talk: “We as an Air Defense Community” [*Luftschutzgemeinschaft*,”] by the Air Raid Warden or his deputy
  8. Show: Nightly Fireworks” [with the special participation of] “Tommy – London” “Flak – Berlin”
  9. Common Song: Good Morning, Good Night!<sup>711</sup>
- [Quoted after Kurt Hirche, *Der “braune” und der “rote” Witz*. (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1964), 186f.]

This text is clearly an allusion to a social evening organized by KdF, containing all the usual elements of such events.<sup>712</sup> Thus, this satirical text serves as a critique of KdF and its endeavor to entertain the German population. At the same time, the fact that the social evening was used as the framework for this parody shows us how familiar Germans were with this type of event.

Not everybody, however, reacted critically or even cynically to KdF’s work toward the end of the war. There were also, at least according to Goebbels in his diary entries, calls from some of the population for more entertainment and leisure events in the face of Allied bombings. He refers to an ongoing urge for “joy” amongst Germans –

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parody or in what form (written or oral) he encountered it.

<sup>711</sup> The song titles come from or allude to the following: for (2): “Alle Vögel sind schon da,” a popular German children’s song, based on a poem by Hoffmann von Fallersleben; for (4) Prussian Military March “Mit Bomben und Granaten,” composed by Benjamin Bilse in 1880; for (5): “*Im tiefen Keller sitz ich hier*,” a folk song composed in the late 18th-century; for (6): “Was kommt dort von der Höh,” a German student song from the 18th century, used by Johannes Brahms in his *Academic Festival Overture*; for (9): Brahms’ “Cradle Song.”

<sup>712</sup> In parodying a KdF social evening, the “program” also included details about alcoholic beverages: “Drinks that are brought along may only be consumed by the entire house community, and not alone in the darkest corner of the basement” – and to the advance warning: “The event will cancelled in the case of travel difficulties on the part of the contributors from London.”

even among those whose apartments had been destroyed by Allied bombs and who now lived in their buildings' basements:

[...] the population has been getting used to the inconveniences of aerial warfare [...] In Cologne, several parties suggested to [Ley] in all seriousness to celebrate carnival next winter. It is astonishing, how much vitality our people still displays in the fifth year of war. [Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998) Part II, vol. 10; entry from Nov. 19, 1943 .]<sup>713</sup>

Goebbels seems convinced that the morale of the home front would hold up – in his view, the English were mistaken to believe that they could break German morale with aerial bombing. He posited that “the war cannot possibly be lost, because of the attitude of the German people.”<sup>714</sup> Calls for more leisure time events were for him proof of this attitude – an attitude that KdF was trying to both evoke and a demand they wished to supply.

Goebbels's “Total War Speech” in Berlin's *Sportpalast* on February 18, 1943, is very famous. Importantly, among its concerns are the regime's commitment to entertainment and “joy production” throughout the hardship of war. These are once again clearly pronounced and KdF's role prioritized. Goebbels exclaimed:

[...] the government undertakes *everything* to maintain the necessary means of relaxation for the working people in these difficult times. Theaters, cinemas, and music halls all remain in full operation. The radio service will continue to augment and perfect its program. We do not, by all means, have the intention to paint a grey winter atmosphere for our people. Whatever serves the people, what keeps, steels and increases its fighting and working

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<sup>713</sup> Ross insightfully observes that “continuing demand for Nazi-approved entertainments towards the end of the war was no longer a sign of the regime's strength but rather of its weakness” (Ross, “Radio, Film and Morale,” 170.)

<sup>714</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1998) Part II, vol. 10, 318; entry from Nov. 19, 1943. In this diary entry, Goebbels seems less worried about Germans' mood at home than he is skeptical about strength at the front: “Now it counts if the front keeps up.”

Of course, it was exactly this “keeping up morale on the home front” that KdF was after with its activities in Germany. It is debatable in this context whether this alleged “good mood” amongst the German population can be interpreted as KdF's doing or whether it would be more accurate to say that KdF, when setting up their offerings, benefited significantly from this previously existing attitude. With regard to the latter, however, I would argue that KdF might be given credit for the existence of an overall “joy-willing” mind set.



strength – that is good and essential to the war effort. The *opposite* has to be done away with! I have thus [...] ordered that sites of mental and emotional recreation in collaboration with our party comrade Ley will not be decreased, but increased! (Bravo-shouts, applause.) That also applies to sports. [Helmut Heiber, *Goebbels, Reden. Band 2, 1939-1945* (Dusseldorf: Droste, 1972), 194.]

Even after the ending of all front entertainment for the soldiers at the front via the leisure organization in September 1944,<sup>715</sup> KdF's activities on the German home front continued, although ever more significantly reduced in scope due to the increasing aerial bombing of German cities and towns. As mentioned above, KdF had to drastically decrease its number of full-time KdF employees; almost all of the organization's work was now done by volunteers. The focus was on providing leisure activities for workers in factories, especially in the areas of sports and more traditional German culture; in addition, cultural leisure events in armament workers' camps continued to be arranged sporadically.<sup>716</sup> KdF's work in the realm of providing cultural events for the broader public had come to an almost complete halt since the September 1944 order had led to the closing of all theaters and the shutting down of museums, galleries and exhibitions and most orchestras in Germany.<sup>717</sup>

KdF, however, remained on Germans' mind even when the war was almost over and most of its leisure activities on a larger public scale had ceased. A March 1945 *Wehrmacht* Propaganda Department report included the following joke in which the leisure organization features:

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<sup>715</sup> Cf. Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg*, 258.

<sup>716</sup> See Buchholz, "Die nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude'," 355.

<sup>717</sup> See Ibid., 357. Already in June 1944, KdF's *Theater des Volkes* was forced to shut down because of damage from bombs; see Eicher, Panse, and Rischbieter, *Theater im "Dritten Reich,"* 85. As mentioned above, the *Bayreuth Kriegsfestspiele* also ceased operation in the summer of 1944.

A woman from St. Pauli [in Hamburg], asked if enemy planes were approaching again, answered: “Yes – are you still surprised about that? They come by daily now, flying around for a jaunt. Well, after all, they can afford to do KdF flights, given our ‘strong’ defense.” [Report by a Wehrmacht Propaganda Officer from Mar. 22, 1945, quoted after Wolfram Wette, *Das letzte halbe Jahr: Stimmungsberichte der Wehrmachtpropaganda 1944/45* (Essen: Klartext-Verl., 2001), 396.]

The woman’s statement is, of course, mostly a critique of the strength of Germany’s army and its defense; it is clear that she does not believe in an imminent German war victory. For our purposes, however, it is particularly interesting that she mentions KdF in this context. Similarly to the previous case of the parody-social evening, her using KdF in her joke indicates the extent to which the leisure organization was part of Germans’ everyday vocabulary. Even in the last days of the war, when KdF was in fact no longer operating on any large scale, its earlier ubiquitous presence in people’s lives means it still looms large in their imaginations.

## EPILOGUE: Happiness and Destruction in the Third Reich

This dissertation analyzed the manifold and numerous activities the Nazi regime effected through its leisure organization KdF, starting shortly after the Nazis came to power and continuing into the last year of World War II. Chapter one explored the general goals and conceptions of KdF, and chapters two and three then traced how it went about implementing these in German factories. We could see here how KdF's work was detached from "totalitarian" control and direct ideological indoctrination; instead, it could rather be argued that it opened up spaces for apolitical or even *eigensinnig* resistance, albeit in a manner overall harmless to the regime. Chapter four then looked at the leisure organization's conception of its work in the German countryside. This revealed that KdF had a much more "ideologized" outlook in this area: here, its "joy production" was closely linked to an attempt to disseminate and ingrain "blood and soil" ideology; I contend, however, that this should be seen as an exception. As chapters five and six then go on to demonstrate, in exploring KdF's wartime work for German front soldiers and on the home front, KdF's work was generally dominated by activities that were "mass-market suitable" and light-hearted in character rather than by either events with a clear political message or that could be counted towards "high-brow" or "*völkisch*" culture. Furthermore, I argue that KdF's was eager to continue its work during the war, and permitted to do so, even exporting it into newly-occupied areas, all of which speaks to the centrality that "joy production" had assumed not only for the leisure organization, but for

the Nazi regime overall. In sum, I contend that KdF was a widely popular organization because of the particular way(s) it operated, and that it shaped Germans' perception of the Nazi regime in a positive manner, so that, by turning Germans into "Hitler's Happy People," it boosted the regime's appeal and stability.

The postwar reception of the Nazi leisure organization in Germany mirrors its earlier positive reception. A 1949 public opinion poll reveals the popularity of KdF four years after the war. In fact, it shows that KdF played a major role in defining a positive memory of the Third Reich after its demise.<sup>718</sup> When asked "Was there something you particularly liked about National Socialism," several interviewees listed KdF.<sup>719</sup> The 1949 poll also confirms my thesis that the leisure organization had a certain "promise function": the researchers conclude that the "memory [of KdF] appears to develop an almost legendary force, through which National Socialism in the [people's] fantasy is again and again regenerated."<sup>720</sup> KdF takes center stage in Germans' positive remembering of the Third Reich: "No matter what the same people [...] cite against National Socialism: the pleasant [...] satisfaction with the exterior image of a social, socialist, worker-friendly Germany of Nazi imprint remains a memory, which compensates for many things [...]"<sup>721</sup> The study concludes that there were many things

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<sup>718</sup> As the authors of the research poll state in the introduction of their study, "the façade of a 'social state' ha[d] lost nothing of its allure" for those living in Germany four years after the war; Institut für Demoskopie, *Das Dritte Reich: Eine Studie über die Nachwirkungen des Nationalsozialismus* (Allenbach: Institut für Demoskopie, 1949), II.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid., 11. Three of the four statements that were chosen by the authors to represent the overall response to this question include a reference to KdF. KdF is also listed by some when affirmatively responding to another question of the poll, which was "Do you believe that National Socialism is a good idea, but was badly executed [during the Third Reich]?" (Ibid., 22.)

<sup>720</sup> Institut für Demoskopie, *Nachwirkungen des Nationalsozialismus*, 12.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., 13.

about the Third Reich that had appealed (and in 1949 still appealed) to Germans, such as “security of wages, order, KdF and the smoothness of political apparatus” – compared to “Weimar politics” – and that the German population liked those things that “saturated their personal lives and made them easier.”<sup>722</sup> In the decade following the end of the Third Reich, then, KdF was fondly remembered by many Germans.<sup>723</sup>

To this day, KdF is a familiar facet of the Third Reich – as I could tell from the reactions of people in Germany when I mentioned my research project; KdF was known to almost all of them.<sup>724</sup> In the contemporary discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* it

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<sup>722</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>723</sup> Even though its “promise factor,” was still important in the reminiscences of the 1940s, it might have lost strength in West Germany with the arrival of Germany’s *Wirtschaftswunder*, which allowed broad swathes of German society to in fact attain many things to make their lives “joyful” and allowed for West Germany’s ascendancy to the status of a global “*Reiseweltmeister*.” (Cf. Hasso Spode, *Wie die Deutschen “Reiseweltmeister” wurden: Einführung in die Tourismusgeschichte: Eine Einführung in die Tourismusgeschichte* (VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012); and Hanna Schissler, *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001). It might be worthwhile to research more closely the memory of KdF in East Germany; an interesting entry point might be the fact that before the building of the wall, the GDR, through its free trade union federation FDGB briefly operated its own cruise ship, named “*Völkerfreundschaft*,” which offered worldwide cruises at subsidized prices (even though GDR tourists were not allowed to disembark at many of the places it passed, for example U.S. ports when travelling to Cuba; cf. Karlheinz Krull and Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund. Feriendienst der Gewerkschaften, *Urlauberschiffe, Boten der Völkerfreundschaft*. (Berlin: Tribüne, 1961); Georg Walther, *Mit dem FDGB-Urlauberschiff Völkerfreundschaft 1961 nach Kuba* (Rostock: Schifffahrtsgeschichtliche Gesellschaft Ostsee e.V., 2004). See also Heide Schwochow, “3. Januar 1960: Das DDR-Urlauberschiff ‘Völkerfreundschaft’ wird übergeben,” *WDR 3 Zeitzeichen*, n.d., <http://www.wdr3.de/zeitzeichen/details/03.01.2010-17.45-3-januar-1960.html> [last accessed May 12, 2012].

<sup>724</sup> Overall, our understanding of the significance of KdF would greatly benefit from more detailed explorations of its “post-war history,” for both East and West Germany. That is, how was KdF remembered, and how did this shape the memory of the Nazi past and the process of “coming to terms” with this period? Of course, such a relationship has to be considered a reflexive one, so that not only could we learn from memories of KdF how the Nazi past was assessed over time, but shifts in the latter would also be reflected back in how KdF is seen in different periods. In a broader sense, the 1980 oral history project on “*Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930-1960*” has done such work. [For example, Lutz Niethammer, “*Die Jahre weiss man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll*”: *Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet, Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960* (Berlin: Dietz, 1983).] On insights into and challenges for such work on the memory of the Third Reich, see Ulrich Herbert, “Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten. Überlegungen zur diachronen Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews,” in “*Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll*”. *Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet. (Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet, 1930 bis 1960,*

plays a somewhat complex role, given the positive reception the organization had in the Third Reich and beyond. This became clear again in the summer of 2009, when plans by the neo-Nazi party NPD to erect a “Kraft durch Freude” museum in Wolfsburg, the former “KdF city” and the production site of Volkswagen, the successor of the KdF-car, became public.<sup>725</sup> Clearly, the neo-Nazis were aware of the vast propagandistic effects KdF had had and could possibly still have as a “positive” element of the Nazi regime; they probably considered commemorating KdF was an ideal – and legal – way to celebrate the Third Reich and especially its “achievements” in the field of social politics. However, the KdF-museum plan for Wolfsburg never happened, mainly because of a swift and strong reaction to this plan in the form of public protests, which successfully averted its realization.<sup>726</sup> This reaction shows how the mainstream discourse does not want to give Neo-Nazis a platform to commemorate the Third Reich and its seemingly positive sides. This mainstream reaction is, fortunately, to be expected but I think we can see here that there was in fact a consensus about the powerful propagandistic effect of KdF – something the NPD hoped for, and the protestors of the museum particularly feared. The latter wanted to avoid the Nazi regime being trivialized by an emphasis on its

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ed. Lutz Niethammer (Berlin: Dietz, 1983), 67–96. Herbert’s findings are discussed in more detail in chapter two, p. 109.

<sup>725</sup> See “NPD plant Museum in Wolfsburg”, n.d., <http://www.braunschweiger-zeitung.de/id524297.html> [last accessed on May 22, 2012.]. On Volkswagen’s history in the Third Reich, see Hans Mommsen and Manfred Grieger, *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: ECON, 1997).

<sup>726</sup> Practically, the city of Wolfsburg averted the plan by buying over the building that the neo-Nazi party had hoped to acquire for its museum, see “Wolfsburg: Stadt wehrt sich gegen Rechtsextremen-Museum ‘Kraft durch Freude’,” *FOCUS Online*, n.d., [http://www.focus.de/panorama/vermishtes/wolfsburg-stadt-wehrt-sich-gegen-rechtsextremen-museum-kraft-durch-freude\\_aid\\_411421.html](http://www.focus.de/panorama/vermishtes/wolfsburg-stadt-wehrt-sich-gegen-rechtsextremen-museum-kraft-durch-freude_aid_411421.html) [last accessed on May 22, 2012]; and Andreas Speit, “Rechtes Museum in Wolfsburg: Keine ‘Kraft durch Freude’ mehr,” *die tageszeitung*, March 2, 2010, sec. Deutschland, <http://www.taz.de/!47786/> [last accessed on May 22, 2012].

“good sides.”<sup>727</sup>

In fact, the provocative version of my thesis posited in the beginning of the introduction to this dissertation – arguing that the Third Reich was a site of happiness, joy and entertainment – could be attacked as a “trivialization” of Nazi Germany, and rightly so.<sup>728</sup> Of course, maintaining such a ‘happiness’ portrayal in general would be deeply wrong and outrageously offensive to the millions of people who were victims of the Nazi dictatorship. I do argue, however, that some “Aryan” Germans perceived Germany during the Third Reich as a “happy place,” or at least imagined it eventually evolve into such a state, and that KdF was considered as a first, partial, fulfillment of this promise. But, of course, Nazism’s promise and ‘positive aspects’ were restricted to those who were allowed access to the *Volksgemeinschaft*; those outside it, and those who fought the regime, were ruthlessly persecuted and murdered.<sup>729</sup> This is also the rationale for the title of my study: the happiness of the Third Reich was limited to those allowed access to the German “racial community,” – only “Hitler’s people” were to expect to be made happy through the regime. At the same time, the “happiness” of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was in

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<sup>727</sup> A certain inability to deal with the memory of KdF (and its “material remains”) can also be seen from the debates about how the giant (unfinished) KdF seaside resort in Prora on the island of Rügen, should be used (or not.) (See “German Youth Hostel Opens in Giant Former Nazi Resort,” *Spiegel Online*, June 7, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/beach-fun-in-hitler-hotel-german-youth-hostel-opens-in-giant-former-nazi-resort-a-772573.html> [last accessed May 25, 2012].) On KdF’s project for a giant seaside resort in Prora, see Hasso Spode, “Fordism, Mass Tourism and the Third Reich: The ‘Strength through Joy’ Seaside Resort as an Index Fossil,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 127–155; Shelley Baranowski, “A Family Vacation for Workers: The Strength Through Joy Resort at Prora,” *German History* 25, no. 4 (2007): 539–559.

<sup>728</sup> On the issue of trivializing Nazi crimes by asking how Germans enjoyed their lives in Nazi Germany, see Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d’ Almeida, “Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany: An Introduction,” in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela E. Swett, Ross, Corey, and Fabrice d’ Almeida (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–15.

<sup>729</sup> Cf. Detlev Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde* (Bund-Verlag, 1982).

great parts based on the misery of the excluded groups.<sup>730</sup> The Third Reich was a terror state, where human liberty, dignity and lives were ignored, where there was no free speech, justice or democracy, and which waged an unprecedented, brutal war against other nations, European Jews and other minorities, causing the death of millions.

KdF's activities, in fact the very existence of this organization, seem to stand rather in contradiction to this horror. However, I believe that we can only fully understand the Third Reich – and answer the old, but still crucially relevant, question of how and why Germans came to support this regime and its crimes – by considering that Nazism's happiness and destruction were inextricably linked. As I have argued in this study, the Third Reich was also made possible because of its efforts to bring everyday happiness and joy to Germans through KdF. On one level, this means that the leisure organization has to be given credit for making Germans support – or at least not stop – the regime's crimes, either because its leisure activities enlarged their sympathies for the regime or because they functioned in a “distracting manner.” In short, KdF helped to stabilize the regime – and in turn helped to make its crimes possible. But it would be wrong to consider KdF merely as a ‘distraction,’ as a ‘nice’ element of a regime that was destructive and joy-averse. KdF was more than a *Schöne Schein* [beautiful appearance]<sup>731</sup> deceitfully created for the German people by the Nazi regime. Instead, it is important to see that “joy” or “happiness” played a crucial role in both Nazi ideology and the operations of the state, with KdF and its practices as an embodiment of this element. Nazi ideology was not “joy-less” – far from it: “one of the most important promises the Nazi

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<sup>730</sup> Cf. Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan, 2007).



movement made [...] was ‘*Freude*’ [...] One struggles to find other dictatorial regimes in the twentieth century that made so much of the theme.”<sup>732</sup> As my discussion highlights, central to this theme was the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the related “joy at belonging to a superior *Volk*.”<sup>733</sup> The positive and integrative ideas related to this concept, and the promises of a “golden future” it entailed, constituted “one of the most important instruments of emotional bonding” [of Germans to a regime] aiming for consent and consensus.”<sup>734</sup> And as I have shown in this dissertation, KdF was intended to – and did – play a major role in building this positively connoted “racial community.”

Nazism – and not just KdF – was about “joy.” KdF was integral to the regime, and not an exception. KdF was a fundamental part of the regime *overall*, and not just in the aspect of joy. KdF shared the Third Reich’s logic, discourses, and ideologies in *all*

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<sup>731</sup> Cf. Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches: Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1992).

<sup>732</sup> Swett, Ross, and d’Almeida, “Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany: An Introduction,” 1. Something Slavoj Žižek notices in his reading of Theodore Adorno may hint at why: “And the link between politics and emotions would be provided by a passing, but crucial remark by Adorno that love is the proper mode of legitimization for totalitarian and authoritarian regimes: precisely because and insofar as they are unable to offer a ‘rational’ ideological legitimization of their exercises of power, they can appeal only to the ‘irrational’ emotion of love [...]” (Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (The MIT Press, 2003), 182, FN 12.) What is said here about love might also work for the concept of joy; in fact, the diffuseness of the concept of ‘joy’ as embraced by the Nazis and KdF might well include ‘love’.

<sup>733</sup> Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2003), 272. Koonz points out that Nazism was based on the “communal ideas of civic improvement,” and its racial thinking “not so much [on] malevolence [than on] ideas of health, hygiene and progress.” (Ibid., 3.) Such ideas in themselves could certainly be described as positive, even productive – and not *per se* as evil and destructive.

<sup>734</sup> Rolf Pohl, “Das Konstrukt ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ als Mittel zur Erzeugung von Massenloyalität im Nationalsozialismus,” in “*Volksgemeinschaft*”: *Mythos, wirkungsmächtige soziale Verheißung oder soziale Realität im “Dritten Reich”?* *Zwischenbilanz einer kontroversen Debatte*, ed. Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 71. The strong “integrative” image of the Third Reich – and of Hitler himself – is also addressed by Götz Aly; see Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), 12 and 25.

respects, including its destructiveness.<sup>735</sup> In the remainder of this epilogue, I will explain what I mean by this and address two aspects of KdF's work which highlight this connectedness to Nazi destruction in a rather literal way. By, first, looking at KdF's "Beauty of Labor" program and its relations to (early) Nazi concentration camps and then, second, at the leisure organization's work in these camps, I will highlight connections – or perhaps better, continuities – between KdF and the Holocaust.

The leisure organization's activities, conducted by its sub-department "Beauty of Labor," and the 'spaces of joy' it created can be seen standing in a direct relation to the 'death spaces' of the Third Reich. The first Nazi concentration camp was opened in March 1933 in Dachau, Bavaria. In its early years, Nazi propaganda described the camp's purpose as the re-education of people with "asocial" behavior, and most of the inmates were political prisoners. A newspaper article from 1933, for example, explained that in Dachau's concentration camp "members of the *Volk* who fell victim to foreign seduction [...] are being educated to become useful members of the National Socialist state by the healing effects of productive work and tight discipline."<sup>736</sup> Publications from the 1930s about the camp, which emphasize its educational purpose, portray clean and orderly men,

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<sup>735</sup> The "juxtaposition of opposing images of 'harmony' [...] and death, and of such violently contradictory feelings as harmony and terror" has been addressed by Saul Friedländer in his reflections on Nazism. (Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 50.

A starting point for further deliberation on the connectedness between happiness and destruction might be Freud, especially his theories about the struggle between the pleasure and life drive on the one side and a death drive on the other side, first developed in Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. James Strachey, The Standard ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

<sup>736</sup> Quoted in Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 28.

working in clean clothes.<sup>737</sup> Remarkably, they bear an uncanny resemblance to the propaganda pictures used to advertise the KdF's "Beauty of Labor" campaigns, which were implemented at the very same time. An article about the Dachau concentration camp from 1936 described it as "'clean,' 'immaculate,' 'beautiful' and 'orderly.'"<sup>738</sup> At the site of the Dachau camp itself, a slogan painted on one of the buildings declared, "There is only one path to freedom. Its milestones are: Obedience, Diligence, Honesty, Orderliness, Cleanliness, Truthfulness, Self-Sacrifice, and Love of the Fatherland."<sup>739</sup> We encounter here a very close and direct association between the concentration camps and KdF's Beauty of Labor in German factories. Both were governed by the very same Nazi discourse on the character and meaning of work. "*Arbeit macht frei*" ["Work liberates"] asserts the sign over the entrance to the Dachau camp (and later at several others camps, including Auschwitz); likewise, the title of a 1943 essay by Robert Ley tells German workers "*Unsere Arbeit macht uns frei*" ["Our work liberates us"].<sup>740</sup>

KdF and its conceptions and practices about cleansing the factory and the worker illustrate the Nazis' concern with having a clean "racial community." Creating a (clean) "living space" [*Lebensraum*] for "Aryan" Germans<sup>741</sup> was thus a Nazi goal shared and fostered by KdF. Thus, we can see the shop floor emerge here as a micro mirror image of

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<sup>737</sup> See, on this and the importance it had for Himmler to make concentration camps known to the public, Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63–67.

<sup>738</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 28. (The article Marcuse writes about was the cover story of an issue of the magazine *Illustrierter Beobachter* and this cover is reproduced as fig. 12 in Gellately, *Backing Hitler*, between 78 and 79.)

<sup>739</sup> Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 29.

<sup>740</sup> Robert Ley, "Unsere Arbeit macht uns frei," in *Die große Stunde: Das Deutsche Volk im Totalen Kriegseinsatz. Reden und Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1941-1943* (Munich: Eher, 1943), 57–65.

the overall German *Lebensraum* from which unworthy and (racially) unclean subjects were to be cleansed.<sup>742</sup> Furthermore, it is arguable that the clean “living spaces” of the Beauty of Labor factories were the flip side of the “death spaces” of the Nazi concentration camps.<sup>743</sup> The underlying policy in both factories and camps was to strengthen the German “racial community” by cleaning it. While the shop floor was a space where a clean “living space” could be achieved by “merely” cleaning the workers and their work sites of material and ideological filth,<sup>744</sup> in the camps this turned into a process of “cleansing” that meant physical extermination.<sup>745</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> See Boaz Neumann, “The National Socialist Politics of Life,” *New German Critique* 85 (2002): 111.

<sup>742</sup> Alf Lüdtke points to this connection between the worker’s obligation to be clean and to work cleanly at his workplace and that worker turned soldier’s later behavior in combat. Looking at letters from worker-soldiers to their employers from the front, Lüdtke argues that “To these people, their original claim to perform a “clean” job at home increasingly became linked to the efficient killing operations of the army. In the end, participation in the extermination of “others” might appear to many as the ultimate fulfillment of those cherished notions of “German quality work.” [Alf Lüdtke, “The Appeal of Exterminating ‘Others’: German Workers and the Limits of Resistance,” *The Journal of Modern History* 64 (December 1, 1992): 66 f.]

<sup>743</sup> I build here on Boaz Neumann, who argues that “Nazi life experience paved the way to the death experience” and sees death in the camps as the counter-experience to that of life in the *Lebensraum*. “Whereas in the *Lebensraum* the Nazis decreed that Aryans experience life as a ‘living life’ (*erlebtes Lebens*’ [sic],) this decree reversed itself in death camps, where one was commanded to experience one’s own death.” [Neumann, “The National Socialist Politics of Life,” 110; cf. also Boaz Neumann, “Death in Auschwitz as ‘Ugly Death,’” in *Language and Revolution – Making Modern Political Identity*, ed. Igal Halfin (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 317-339.]

<sup>744</sup> The idea of cleaning workers and factories can be linked to discourses of eugenics and “racial hygiene,” also going back to the nineteenth century. Following this tradition, the Nazis implemented a “euthanasia” program labeled “*Aktion T4*,” which aimed to “clean” the German population of “life unworthy of life,” killing about 200,000 disabled people in the years from 1939 until 1945; cf. Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: “Euthanasia” in Germany C. 1900-1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). In terms not only of its aims but also its personnel and technologies, the Nazi “euthanasia” program can furthermore be seen as a crucial predecessor to the extermination politics undertaken as part of the “Final Solution.” Both programs can be considered outcomes of the Nazi goal to achieve “cleanliness,” which also underlay KdF’s politics on the shop floor.

<sup>745</sup> On concentration camps, see for example Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); as well as Karin Orth, *Das System der Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Eine Politische Organisationsgeschichte* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999); *Die Konzentrationslager-SS: Sozialstrukturelle Analysen und Biographische Studien* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000). See also volume three of Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003).

Connecting KdF and the Holocaust even more immediately is the leisure organization's importing of it "joy production" directly into concentration camps. These activities were part of KdF's wartime troop entertainment efforts. Believing in its maxim that "joy gives strength," KdF wanted to make sure not to exclude from its undertaking those Germans who were employed, mainly by the SS and *Wehrmacht*, in concentration camps.<sup>746</sup> Accordingly, it arranged concerts, vaudeville evenings and theater performances in various concentration camps. In Auschwitz, for example, there were at least 51 KdF events between May 1942 and December 1944.<sup>747</sup> The last leisure event was scheduled for December 19, 1944, which means that entertainment for SS-guards at Auschwitz continued until around one month before the camp's liberation.

KdF leisure events at Auschwitz concentration camp consisted primarily of theater and vaudeville performances, complemented by social evenings and concerts.<sup>748</sup> KdF's (rather cynical) concern to turn camps into joyful and amusing places – at least for

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<sup>746</sup> The entertainment of SS-guards at concentration camps was based on a 1940 agreement between KdF-leader Robert Ley and *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler. (See BArch HI/20, pag. 134; circular by the head of the *SS-Hauptamt*, Berlin, Feb. 26, 1940.) Dating from February 1942 was an additional agreement between Ley and Himmler. (Agreement between Robert Ley and Heinrich Himmler, Feb. 1, 1942 [BArch NS 3/549.]) This contract between the leader of the SS and the head of DAF facilitated cooperation between the entire SS, on the one hand, and the leisure organization's department *Volksbildungswerk*, on the other. According to this agreement, all offices and units of the *Waffen-SS* were permitted to use the facilities of KdF's Institute for the Education of the German People. The SS would be involved in planning the events in this realm for SS-men, and the cost would be carried by the SS Department for Education [*SS-Hauptamt-Schulungsamt*]. The latter also had the right to examine the participation of SS-men in the *Volksbildungswerk*'s events and the success of these events.

<sup>747</sup> This number relates to the events listed in a document referring to the Central Construction Office of the *Waffen-SS* and Police Auschwitz (all events took place in *Kameradschaftsheim der Waffen-SS* [Comradeship Home of the Armed SS; see USHMM RG.11.001 Zentralbauleitung Waffen SS Auschwitz, reel 23]) and to those listed in documents from 1944, which appear to refer to the entire SS staff at Auschwitz, including the Central Construction Office (see USHMM RG 04.006, reel 1; summaries of orders of *SS-Standortältester* at Auschwitz.)

<sup>748</sup> There were fifteen theater and ten vaudeville performances, seven social evenings and seven concerts. In addition, there were three lectures and three opera performances during this period at Auschwitz, and four dance shows.

a couple of hours and, of course, exclusively for the SS guards – is clearly illustrated by the sheer quantity of events it organized: for 1943 and 1944, there were 24 events per year, averaging two leisure events per month. However, we can also – again – see the concern for “joy production” in the names of these events. Vaudeville performances staged in Auschwitz were entitled “Humorous Attack” [*“Humorvoller Angriff,”*] “Pleasant and Cheerful [Entertainment] in Word and Sound” [*“Besinnliches und Heiteres in Wort und Ton,”*] or simply “Funny Vaudeville” [*“Lustiges Variete.”*]<sup>749</sup>

This emphasis on the production of “happiness” can also be discerned for the Stutthof concentration camp near Gdansk, Poland. Most of the KdF events organized for Stutthof’s camp SS were vaudeville shows – once again with rather telling names like “Nice Things That Cause Joy” [*“Nette Sachen, die Freude machen,”*] “Cabaret of Laughter” [*“Lachende Kleinkunst,”*] “Cheerful Sheet of Pictures” [*“Fröhlicher Bilderbogen,”*] “Colorful Potpourri” [*“Buntes Allerlei”*], or, plainly, “Happiness” [*“Freude.”*]<sup>750</sup>

We can see that there was a clear emphasis on light and amusing entertainment in these spaces of destruction and murder. This is also visible in other areas of KdF’s work

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<sup>749</sup> See USHMM RG.11.001, Zentralbauleitung Waffen SS Auschwitz, reel 23, and USHMM RG 04.006, reel 1.

<sup>750</sup> Overall, the records list 42 KdF leisure events at the Stutthof concentration camp in the period from October 1942 to August 1944. These events took place at various locations: in Stutthof’s *SS-Kameradschaftsheim* [Comradeship Home of the SS]; in Elbing, a sub-camp of the Stutthof concentration camp (in a “recreational home” [*“Erholungsheim,”*] in a pub, in Elbing’s city theatre or in the KdF building in the town Tiegenhof, which was about 20 km away from the main camp). Of these 42 events, six were concerts, nine were theater performances, 14 were vaudeville shows, one was a lecture, five were performances of operas, and seven were social evenings. (USHMM RG.04.0458.) In addition, I found evidence for KdF leisure events in the Hinbert concentration camp, which was located in the west of Germany near the Luxembourg border. According to the documents I identified, there were at least 34 leisure events at this concentration camp in the period January 1940 to December 1943: eleven vaudeville evenings, six concerts, four theater plays, two lectures, two movies and nine social evenings. (BArch NS4/20.)

in camps, besides vaudeville evenings. None of the fifteen theater pieces performed at Auschwitz, for example, can be considered part of the (German) classical canon. Instead, all of them were either comedies or folk plays.<sup>751</sup>

The incorporation of KdF into concentration camps is highly significant.<sup>752</sup> It illustrates the commitment and belief in “joy production” on the parts of both KdF specifically and the Nazi regime in general. Bringing joy was important, even if it was to those places located the furthest conceivable distance from happiness. As we know from Himmler’s infamous Posen-speech, leading Nazis were aware that mass murder could damage even the most committed SS-men.<sup>753</sup> I read KdF’s activities in concentration camps as yet another of the organization’s strengthening of those Germans “fighting for the Reich,” here against the reputed “*Reichsfeinde*” [enemies of the *Reich*] incarcerated in

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<sup>751</sup> Geerte Murmann also addresses theatrical performances in concentration camps. For example, she refers to testimony from German actor Dieter Borsche about a 1943 appearance of his ensemble at the Auschwitz concentration camp: “They performed there for the SS and had been generously regaled, served by inmates. [...] Borsche learned from the SS-men that theater troupes performed for them quite often.” [Geerte Murmann, *Komödianten für den Krieg: Deutsches und Alliiertes Fronttheater* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992), 179.] Murmann also recounts the experiences of an actress who was part of a theater troupe that had performed Lessing’s *Minna von Barnhelm* at the Buchenwald concentration camp: “They were told they were to perform ‘for soldiers.’ First, they passed neat one-family houses with flowers in the gardens and in the windows, the domiciles of the SS-families. Then she started to become scared when they drove through a large gate; behind it, there were many SS-men with rifles ready to fire and terrifying dogs on leashes. Not a single inmate would have been visible, however. [...] She saw one inmate – the only one –, when she forgot her ring, which played a role in the play, on stage. She ran back to the stage and witnessed an inmate – shaven, emaciated, in striped prisoners’ clothing – tidying up the chairs. The inmate remained silent and pretended not to have seen her. Deeply horrified by this sight, she [said she] went back to her colleagues. Then they were immediately shipped back to Weimar.” (Ibid., 180.) On KdF in concentration camps, see also Frank Vossler, *Propaganda in die eigene Truppe: Die Truppenbetreuung in der Wehrmacht 1939-1945* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2005), 312–314.) Here, Vossler also addresses performances by concentration camp inmates, mostly to entertain the camp personnel. KdF was not involved in such activities.

<sup>752</sup> On joy of SS men at concentrations camps, see, for example, Thomas Kühne, “The Pleasure of Terror: Belonging Through Genocide,” in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d’Almeida (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 234-255.

<sup>753</sup> Speech of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler at a meeting of senior SS officers in Posen, 4 October 1943; excerpts reproduced in Roderick Stackelberg and Sally Anne Winkle, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts* (Psychology Press, 2002), 370–371.

camps. In this view, “pleasure, including [...] entertainment prevent[ed] the death machinery from breaking down;” “Pleasure compensate[d] destruction, that is [in regards to Nazi perpetrators] one’s own destructiveness.”<sup>754</sup>

Once more, however, this would be merely a “distraction argument.” I believe there is more to it. First, the victory over all these “enemies” would bring about the “eternal happiness” for Germany the Nazis sought. Second, the very killing would produce joy, not in a sadistic manner, but because “perpetrating and supporting the genocide against the Jews becomes part of the Nazi-envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft*.” I am building here on an argument by Thomas Kühne, who sees “pleasure as the oil, rather than as the valve for the Nazi terror machine.” According to his view, pleasure and joy “fuelled the genocide of the Third Reich.” The pleasure Kühne means is that of “togetherness and belonging.”<sup>755</sup> If we follow this type of reading, we see a(nother) convergence between KdF and the Holocaust: both were committed to – and motivated by – the creation of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*. In its most extreme form, we could then read the Nazi crimes of the Holocaust as another avenue of Nazi “joy production.”

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<sup>754</sup> Kühne, “Pleasure of Terror,” 236.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid., 237. On how Nazi perpetrators might have looked back to the period of the Holocaust as the “Good Old Days,” cf. the documents assembled in Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, eds., *“The Good Old Days”: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York: Free Press, 1991). The collection’s title is taken from the caption [“*Schöne Zeiten*”] of the private photo album of the last commandant of Treblinka; the album includes pictures of the Treblinka concentration camp, the site of the deaths of least 700,000 people. (See Ibid., xix.)



## LIST OF ARCHIVES [ABBREVIATIONS]

Archiv “Deutsches Gedächtnis”/ Archive “German Memory”, Lüdenscheid  
[Archiv “Dt. Gedächtnis”]

Bundesarchiv/ Federal Archives, Berlin and Freiburg [BArch]

Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/ Picture Archive Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation

Deutsches Technik Museum Berlin, Archiv/ German Technical Museum Berlin, Archive  
[DTMB]

Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München/ Institute of Contemporary History, Munich [IfZ Munich]

Historisches Archiv Krupp/ Historical Archive Krupp, Essen [Historisches Archiv Krupp]

Landesarchiv Berlin/ State Archives Berlin [LA Berlin]

Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover/ State Archives of Lower Saxony Hannover  
[NHStA]

Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel/ State Archives of Lower Saxony Wolfenbüttel)  
[StA WF]

Niedersächsisches Wirtschaftsarchiv Braunschweig/ Business Archive of Lower Saxony  
Brunswick [NWA]

Schering Archiv/ Schering Archives, Berlin [Schering]

Sportmuseum Berlin/ Sports Museum Berlin [Sportmuseum]

Stadtarchiv Goslar/ City Archive Goslar [SA GS]

Tagebucharchiv Emmendingen / Diary Archive Emmendingen [DTA]

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